

EP 9488

THESE ARE REAL PEOPLE

LIST OF PREVIOUS BOOKS BY ROSITA FORBES

TRAVEL

KUFRA. THE SECRET OF THE SAHARA

ADVENTURE

RED SEA TO BLUE NILE. (ABYSSINIA)

With a preface by Field-Marshall Viscount Allenby

CONFLICT. ANGORA TO AFGHANISTAN

With a preface by Major-General Sir Percy Sykes

EIGHT REPUBLICS IN SEARCH OF A FUTURE. (SOUTH AMERICA)

With a preface by Viscount D'Abernon

WOMEN CALLED WILD

FORBIDDEN ROAD—KABUL TO SAMARKAND

BIOGRAPHY

EL RAISUNI. SULTAN OF THE MOUNTAINS

NOVELS

ONE FLESH

ORDINARY PEOPLE

THE EXTRAORDINARY HOUSE

THE GOLDEN VAGABOND



MISS ROSITA FORBES

THESE ARE REAL PEOPLE

BY
ROSITA FORBES

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PREFACE WITH A PURPOSE

NOT long ago a Persian sufi said to me : " If you cannot see, it is a defect in you, not in the things which are there to be seen." We were sitting in a garden full of flowering trees and streams, but with no grass in it. A nightingale sang in a thicket of white roses. I suspect it was caged. We ate fruits piled up on a tray that certainly came from Birmingham, and my host discussed, in turn, the defects of our national characters, mysticism and metaphysical poetry. He was a very learned man and he had a sense of humour, so I followed the example of Scheherazade in the *Thousand and One Nights*. I told him the tale of the unbelieving American, following it with the tale of the equally incredulous Arab. Here they are : While I was in the great Middle-West where factory chimneys represent the smoky way to heaven, and the earth cannot be seen for corn or the yellow taxis in which men pursue time, I gave a vast number of lectures about countries and peoples which good Americans considered altogether too remote or improbable. By way of light relief, I used to describe the customary Arab banquet consisting of a sheep roasted whole and served complete with head and tail. I told how the host would gouge out one of the eyes and present it, with all its unpleasant attachments, to the principal guest who, pale but polite, would pretend the glutinous object was an oyster and make every effort to swallow it at a single gulp. After this exchange of courtesies, I said, it was difficult to keep one's thoughts from the second eye and its probable destination.

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Such an occurrence, of course, would rouse no surprise in the breast of the tourist in North Africa accustomed to the invitations of Arab sheikhs, but for some reason which I have never fathomed, America, which can credit the most startling tales of savages where there are only macadam roads and a superfluity of plumbing, or massacres where indeed there are not even sufficient local inhabitants to supply the tale of corpses, could NOT believe that any reasonable human being, with a right to nicely adjusted calories and proteins, *could* be expected to devour a sheep's eye.

Therefore did a charming young man, bolder than his fellows, voice the general opinion: "Sure, Ma'am," he said, with the respect due to a really good lie, "I could not help thinking of that eye way down inside you seeing all the private things it should NOT see." A pause. Then: "It is a whale of a story. Do you get away with it often?"

My Persian friend smiled. "I have eaten much worse than a sheep's eye," he said, "when I have slept in the black tents of Lurs or Baktiari, but what is the sequel, I pray you?"

"In the Yemen," I related, "I was once—in great heat and with considerable damage to my temper—climbing the great wall of cliff that leads from the Tehama, the flat plain bordering the Red Sea, to the plateau of the interior. To one of my guides, a yellow-brown man with hair of black silk, a skin across his shoulders and cartridge belts wrapped about his person, I said impatiently: 'If we were in my country we should get into a box at the bottom of this steep place. We should press a knob as small as the top of your finger and immediately we should be carried right up to the top.' The hillman looked at me with much the same expression as the young American. For him elevators or funiculars did not exist, whereas, if one were fortunate, one might eat a sheep's eye whenever one claimed a night's shelter at a hospitable

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camp. ‘That is a lion of a story,’ he said, ‘but do not expect men to believe it.’”

In the Persian garden, with pyramids of white roses leaning over the carpet on the edge of which reposed my host’s shoes, silence fell. A discreet youth with a face of parchment brought water-pipes, a ewer and basin exquisitely wrought in silver and a slab of frightful pink soap. After due consideration my host repeated the Arab proverb, which I had first heard in the tent of El Raisuni, brigand, warrior, and prophet of the Atlas mountains: “The World is as wide as a man’s imagination.”

It is probable that the speaker, who had devoted his life to thought, had never been forced into hurried action, yet he reflected aloud: “By the magnitude of his belief, shall a man approach divinity.”

I have often remembered his words when faced with what my reason insists must be impossible.

For seventeen years I have travelled the length and the breadth of the world and I have seen much that is inexplicable, but I am now prepared to believe a good deal that in more ignorant years I would have discredited without a second thought.

For this reason I wrote *Women called Wild*. I thought it might interest the people who live with the conveniences and within the limitations of civilization to hear about dimensions beyond their own. For West and East, North and South there are a host of human beings whose objectives and emotions, whose circumstances, powers, and beliefs are utterly different from and often opposed to ours. We label them patriots or revolutionaries, witches, priestesses, frauds, savages, and saints, or else we refuse to believe in their existence. But that does not prevent them from living and dying in their own peculiar ways which are not ours.

From an American college a professor wrote of *Women*

called *Wild* that it was 'a challenge to the prevailing fashion of thought,' but the book had no such spectacular purpose. It was intended to tell the tales of exceptional women, some 'civilized' and some 'savage,' and to show the relativity of the two terms, for the major difference between sophistication and simplicity is that the first pre-supposes a multiplicity of needs and the second an elimination of all unnecessary adjuncts.

These are Real People differs from the earlier book in that it is concerned primarily with men. It tells the stories, so far as I know them, of men who, because of their characters and surroundings, because of things which they had done, or which had happened to them, were for the time being extraordinary.

I have included only one tale of witchcraft, for I realize that it must be as hard for my rational fellow-countrymen to believe in that which they cannot, as yet, scientifically explain, as it is for a Trobrian Islander to comprehend television or wireless. If the pig is the most formidable animal known to the latter, an aeroplane to him must remain 'the pig that flies through the air.' In inverse fashion we are liable to attribute to illusion much that more primitive people, inspired by instinct instead of reason, accept as a matter of course.

For my own part I feel that I do not know enough about 'witchcraft' to be able to credit or discredit it, and under this misused term I am for the moment referring—without justification—to all that is occult, from the *Study of the Hundred Names of God*, with its novitiate of forty years, to the commonplace black magic based on hypnotism. I believe that one does certainly see the phenomena intended by the hierophant, but I do not think these same phenomena always exist.

It is exceedingly difficult for the novice to decide where hypnotism ends and the occult sciences begin. So when, in Haiti, one sees, or believes one sees, a decapitated head restored

P R E F A C E W I T H A P U R P O S E

to a body none the worse for the separation,¹ or in the Libyan desert a corpse that has been buried for three days apparently rise up and answer questions,² one can only say : ' This is what happened, but I do not know what caused it to happen.'

In such words an intelligent savage might be expected to refer to the powers of gas or electricity.

For seventeen years, in a host of copybooks, I have made notes about the people I have met here, there, and everywhere. Sometimes the notes are fragmentary. They lead nowhere. They just record an impression of a man or a woman with whom I came in contact for a few minutes and who seemed to me unusual.

For instance, a month ago on the frontier of Uganda and the Congo, four of us were waiting, hot, dusty, and somewhat dishevelled, for customs formalities to be fulfilled. The shed where a solitary official worked among stacks and stacks of papers stood with its feet in the lake. It may perhaps have been cool. It had no other recommendation. To it, while we waited, there came a woman driving a large sleek car. She wore white linen admirably limited—the briefest shorts and a scrap of a shirt. She swanked up the steps of the old wooden shed with her hands in her pockets, and the official rose to greet her, upsetting hillocks of papers. She was thin and very brown, with dark twisted lips and eyes of smudged charcoal. I had never imagined that a sun helmet could be becoming to any woman, but this one wore hers tilted over an ear and her dark hair rushed up on the other side, curving deliciously at the ends. She looked hard, bitter, and reckless. She had lovely hands, and she showed off with them. I don't know if she was beautiful or not, but I wrote a long description of her in my copybook and hoped to hear of a history as dramatic as her appearance. All over the Belgian

¹ See *Women called Wild*, by Rosita Forbes.

² See *Adventure*, by Rosita Forbes.

Congo I asked about her. She was the Baronne de l'Épine. Her husband had a fishery on Lake Victoria. They spent six months of the year in Africa and six in Brussels. She had children, and that was all I heard of her.

Sometimes, however, the copious notes I have made do tell the beginning or the end, and on rare occasions even the whole of a story. From among such I have chosen the incidents for this book and I have changed nothing except the names of living people. Obviously I did not record at the time the exact wording of every conversation, but when an individual or a situation interested me—in China or Central America, in the islands of far-away seas, or in the capital cities of five continents, in the 'brave new worlds' with which we are all so familiar, or in those far braver old worlds inspired by faiths little known to us—I filled pages with intricate descriptions of everybody and everything concerned.

Often, after I have read a number of admirably written novels in which nothing happens except in the minds of the characters, I am inclined to be ashamed of my old-fashioned life in which a great deal has happened. Then I turn to my copybooks for reassurance. In them I can read of gallant actions and desperate ones, of actions that were as curious and involved, as absurd, as interesting, as inevitable as and on occasions even more effective than ideas.

In spite of all this material relating to the activities of strangers, I am always relieved when I receive letters like the following addressed from a suburb of Liverpool :

"I am so interested" [wrote the potential Alice in Wonderland, who said she was forty, comfortably off, and unoccupied] "to hear about people to whom things happen. I am sure that—outside England where motor accidents and income tax are the worst you can expect!—there must be hundreds of people like us but who do not lead our sort of lives at all. I am so tired of reading about ordinary people doing the same things that I do every day. Can't you tell us about the extraordinary people you must have met?"

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I thought the writer had a sense of humour and I very nearly made her a present of some of my copybooks, but those I preferred were already smeared with mud, dust, insects, paraffin, saddle-grease, and mosquito lotion, sea-water, and the traces of many meals.

Just before I left London to spend eight months wandering about Africa, a man wrote to me from Newcastle.

“I never read a novel” [he said]. “I like to read about real people, and anyway most novels are so dull. Nothing ever happens in them. This is considered modern, but look at Germany, Russia, and Italy——” [He might, I thought, have added Abyssinia and Chicago, China, Spain, Patagonia, and Mexico, not to mention the smaller republics which make a habit of revolution.] “Enough seems to happen in those countries and I think we can hear too much of thoughts and motives. So when you write another book, please let it be about real people and the things that certainly do happen, hot and strong, outside England, I mean.”

While remaining uncertain as to where most things ‘happen,’ in civilization or out of it, and whether mental or physical activities are the more important—to this woman within reach of Liverpool, to this man in Newcastle, and to all others who appreciate the infinite variety of living, its violence, and its irresistible lack of logic, I dedicate these stories of ordinary and extraordinary people in circumstances more or less fantastic.

ROSITA FORBES.

A Romantic Man with a Knife

SUMATRA

UNTIL we discovered the Frenchman, there had been nothing to do but lie about the deck, watching the sun creep under a tattered awning. If I remember rightly, there were eleven passengers and three chairs.

In a flat calm, the tramp made a fuss about getting from Singapore to Medan in Sumatra. Her engines rattled. An inordinate amount of smoke belched from her funnel.

It was the third day out. The men who had been talking of vanilla, copra and hemp relaxed into attitudes indicative of the temperature. Their worn canvas shoes sprawled over the edge of the shadow. They shouted for the steward whose shrunken trousers contrasted with a coat three sizes too large. Soon there were rows of empty glasses, which had contained 'Doctor Funk' cocktails. But conversation dragged.

On the big liners no doubt the planters swapped tales unexpectedly true, for that which they had seen and done in the ruthless islands was stranger than anything their imaginations could conceive. But the tramp bore a cargo of wreckage cast up from the plantations of Malaya. Its components knew the limit of each other's veracity. They knew altogether too much and they were dead sick of talking about it.

Lunch had been tinned. That was inevitable, but it had been greasy as well. Conscious of discomfort and waiting

for it to increase, the passengers moved only to feel their stomachs. In the bowels of the ship, a chain dragged. I felt as if it were being hauled out of my own body. There must have been something very wrong with the lunch.

The Frenchman just happened ! I suppose he came up the companion, but nobody saw him do so. Until that moment, nobody had seen him at all. He was young and he looked remarkably clean. That is all I remember about his first appearance, because my inside defeated me and I went below.

“ He’s going to some tobacco plantations inland . . . ” said a voice in the gangway. I looked up to see one of the indistinguishable grey men who had spent a lifetime earning their drink in the tropics.

“ Who is ? ” I asked.

“ That French fellow, some name like cockatoo, he has.”

After that, nobody talked of anything but Henri Laurent Cocteaux. He was worth talking about for, very evidently, he had a future. He was eager. He actually wanted to get ashore. The inertia lifted. Men rolled on to their sides or leaned against the ladder to the bridge. They pulled themselves together and boasted about the deals they had effected and the way they had put it across their boys or the Government officials.

The Frenchman listened. He was polite and he had an unusual command of language, but he preferred ideas to facts. After he had explained that he was going to join a friend whose estate lay at the foot of the hills rising towards Lake Toba, he evidently felt he had exhausted the subject of himself.

Thereafter, while we sat on the poop, isolated from the human flotsam dispersed by the slump in rubber, he talked of Malayan gods and goddesses. He improvised couplets after the fashion of the plantation labourers and explained

their metre. One night I remember I spoke of some dancing girls I had seen at a native festival. Henri Laurent stretched his arms above his head and stared at the moon. Flying fish spattered across the sea, stretched like oil silk to the horizon. "I hope you were disappointed," he said.

"Why?"

"Because there are no beautiful dancing girls. They only exist in our imagination, or in the palaces where we can't see them."

"They produce the effect of beauty. That's good enough," I said.

But the Frenchman argued with more violence than the subject deserved. "Ugliness is a crime," he insisted. "Perhaps it is the only crime, but one can forgive it when it is frank. When it hides itself under a semblance of loveliness, it is a leper in a priest's vestments."

Long afterwards when I heard the end of Laurent, I realized what lay behind such phrases. At the time, I thought him a romantic and hoped I should not make the mistake of thinking anything else about him.

The moon swelled and sank, but we remained on deck, possibly because our berths were fully occupied by cockroaches.

With every appearance of sincerity, the young man said: "What a chance to find you on board!" Upon which, I dutifully confessed an impatience that prevented me waiting for a liner. "And you? Why are you 'tramping'?"

"I like to be near the sea," he replied, and told me about the demon serpent who devours Malayan fishermen.

I was restless because I would have preferred to talk about myself.

Henri looked at me with eyes like a cat's. I was sure he could see in the dark. He talked of magicians who could kill or cure with leaves. "There is everything in the forest,

but one must live with it. To be in it is not enough. That is what you English can never understand."

It seemed to me then that Henri Laurent was likely to be as lonely as any other young man whose imagination divided him from the rest of the world.

On the last morning, with Medan in sight, I learned more about the Frenchman. He could not stand the sight of blood. The tramp possessed no machinery for lifting the cover of the hold. Half a dozen Tamils struggled with it and just as they swung it to one side the tramp lurched as if she had struck a shoal. The heavy wood rolled back, pinning one of the sailors underneath. He fell with his leg across the opening and when they dragged the cover off him, the limb looked as if it had been flayed. While the Tamils made a great deal of noise, one of the grey men took charge of the situation. "The bone's broken. Here, Cocteaux, you lay hold of him. I'll try and set it. He'll have a better chance if we do it at once."

But the Frenchman did not move. He stood there, looking as if he were going to be sick. His throat worked. After a moment, he turned away.

"Got no guts, that fellow," said the grey man, who had breakfasted on alcohol. He repeated the sentence while he dealt unhesitatingly with flesh that looked as if it could have been mopped up on blotting-paper.

"I don't know . . ." I said while I rendered what help I could, not at all certain whether the uncomfortable sensations in my middle were due to the state of the Tamil, or the imminent loss of Henri Laurent.

Some weeks later I stayed on a plantation among the foothills and the manager, having shown me what he called 'the three T's,' teak, tigers and tapioca, introduced me to his only neighbours. They were French. The owner of the estate was a lean and taciturn man in the middle forties.

A ROMANTIC MAN WITH A KNIFE

He had been severely wounded at Verdun and could not use his left arm. He lived alone in an ugly modern bungalow, but rumour had it that the daughter of his native overseer relieved his solitude.

On the edge of a forest, in a clearing, bounded by rank red flowers, his assistant, Henri Laurent Cocteaux, was still supposed to be 'settling into' an entirely different kind of house. It was built in native fashion, with enormous upturned eaves, surmounted by horns of oxen. Spiders' webs hung across the lattices, which took the place of windows. As soon as I saw the house I thought how perfectly it suited the dreamer of dreams who, by some odd fate, was expected to know all about production and accountancy.

A slip of a boy, Malayan, I supposed, and a most delicate golden brown, led me into a room, unfurnished except for the mats on the floor, a couple of hard divans and a table about fourteen inches high. Henri Laurent came in at once. He kissed my hands one after the other and when he looked up from them with a laughing, "What hands, Madame ! Where did you get them and what strange things do they know ?" I remarked again the curious effect of his eyes. They were lighter than the sunburned skin and they held the inner gleam of an animal's.

We drank cocktails made by Ngah, the supple young image with a closed face, who had accompanied his master from Singapore. "He is more a familiar than a servant," explained the Frenchman, cross-legged upon the mats. "It is from him I learned about Hantu Golek who comes running out of a tomb wrapped in his shroud and Mati Anak, the stillborn monster ! We make 'pantuns'¹ together, but he is better than I am at rhyming."

Dusk crept into the room. The red walls were satisfactorily mysterious. It seemed to me more than suitable that

¹ Two-line poems of satire or praise.

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the only work of art should be a kriss. It lay on the table and the last glimmer of sunshine strayed over the elaborately jewelled handle. "What a beauty," I said, and drew it from the sheath. The blade was very sharp, but the tip needed cleaning. I showed it to Henri.

"It is a ceremonial weapon," he said, "given me by a Javanese sultan. There is a legend about it." He touched the rusty point. "See here where it is reddened. They say it calls for blood. In such a condition no native would dare touch it."

"What d'you mean? It can't change by itself."

"Perhaps not. All I know is that I cleaned it the night I left Singapore. And look, it is thirsty again."

The implication of the words escaped me because, at that moment, Ngah came into the room. He came soundlessly with a tray in his hands, but when he saw what his master held, he dropped his burden and stood as if deprived of the power of movement. I had never seen anyone so still.

The Frenchman said something in Malayan, using not the pidgin-Motu, in which planters talk to their labourers, but the lovely fluent 'language of flowers and gods.'

Ngah shuddered and slipped out of the room.

I suppose I asked what it meant, although questions did not come easily in that atmosphere.

"When a kriss has drunk blood," explained the Frenchman, "which applies, of course, to any of these museum pieces, it is supposed to induce a lust for killing. Ngah is the gentlest little creature in the world and he couldn't bear to touch this thing. Besides, he's in love."

I thought that my host, slight, worn, with an exaggeratedly sensitive mouth, was as unsuited as his servant to be the owner of a killing kriss, but it was a lovely object. I longed to possess it. The blade was delicately engraved and the hilt a curve of gold heaped with fruits of many colours.

A ROMANTIC MAN WITH A KNIFE

“Whom does Ngah love?” I asked, fingering the kriss.

“She’s the daughter of the gardener.”

“Is she pretty?” I asked.

“Too pretty for Ngah, I’m afraid. Her father intends to marry her to a man of substance.” The Frenchman’s voice was whimsical.

“What’ll the boy do?”

“Can one ever tell, for a fraction of a minute, what any of these people will do? Haven’t you watched them withdraw behind the armour of their smiles?”

“You ought to know Ngah if he’s been with you so long,” I retorted.

“Not so long, but so *deep*, yes, perhaps! But I only know what he shows me.”

Some quality of tone made me say, “You are devoted to him?”

“Yes,” returned Henri Laurent.

When the crops ripened there was a festival in a village near the Frenchman’s estate. I wanted to see it, so Henri invited me to spend the night under his curling eaves topped with horns. He would occupy his friend’s newly varnished verandah. Thus would convention be satisfied and everyone be put to as much trouble as possible! The young man mocked me with his cat’s eyes, but I didn’t mind. I thought it would be fun to go down with him in the moonlight to a fantastic hall, where hideous women more effective than beauties would dance in honour of spirits so terrific that their names can never be mentioned! I thought it would be quite fun, too, to sleep on a black divan within a few inches of the floor, with a lantern over my head and the sounds of the forest seeping through the lattices.

As it happened, none of these plans materialized. I spent that particular night on a mountain-side, with my head on Henri’s shoulder and a murderer within reach. But by that

time I had come to the conclusion that murder was an accident, until, of course, it develops into a habit. Anyway, it was all the fault of the kriss.

I arrived at the curly eaved bungalow before noon. Henri was clean, meticulously shaved and rather vague. Ngah, on the other hand, was anything but clean. I had never seen him in such a state. With his sarong as crumpled as his pathetic little face, and earth smeared upon his body, he looked like one of the 'bewitched' he was so fond of talking about.

"His love affair has gone wrong," explained Henri. "The girl has been betrothed to the man of substance I predicted. I'm afraid this will have an effect on the curry—generally, it is a poem."

But Ngah's art stood the strain of his misery. He served us a perfect curry which we ate out of bowls, seated upon the floor. He provided us with water in which to wash. He even laid out a change of clothing for his master. Then he ran 'amok.' In other words, he took the kriss which thirsted for blood and went, soft-footed, to the gardener's house. The girl whom he loved because she was like a yellow flower, half-opened, 'occupied herself with sleep' as is customary during the heat of the day. She lay rolled upon a mat and Ngah didn't wake her. He drove the blade between her shoulders and her red dress became redder still.

Subsequently he disappeared, but the news ran ahead of him to the village. An 'amok' was loose. The street emptied of careless sleepers. Men, women and children sought shelter in their houses, for, when once an 'amok' has killed, he will go on doing so until his strength fails. He spares no one, for even if he knows the difference between friend and enemy, the thing which possesses him can only be satisfied by blood.

A sweating runner brought the tale to Henri. I expected hesitation and a horror that did not know what to do, for

A ROMANTIC MAN WITH A KNIFE

I remembered the scene on the tramp when the Tamil had smashed his leg. But Henri put on his coat and appeared, uncreased, at my door. "I must go and get him," he said. As an afterthought, he added : "I can fetch you my revolver, if you like, but I don't think there's any ammunition."

"Don't bother !" I replied, looking round for my boots. For I had no intention of being left in that red and eerie house, where so far as I knew, there was not a single bolt and the lattices were matchwood. But it surprised me that Henri did not argue when I said : "I'm coming with you." Perhaps he was sure of his influence over Ngah. Perhaps he could not believe the gentle little creature was really 'amok.'

"It is not exactly madness," he explained as we set out for the village in a none too healthy car. "It is more the bursting of a soul overcharged. Do you understand ? I mean that Ngah is perfectly conscious of what he's doing. He will make plans and carry them out as if he were getting on with a normal day's work. He's got to kill—that's all."

"Well, it's enough, isn't it ? "

"Yes," agreed the Frenchman. "It is enough."

In the village, information leaped at us from behind closed doors. The 'amok' had been seen here, he was going there. He had done this or that, but he had not yet secured another victim.

A labourer fled up the lane, deeply rutted. He panted from haste and terror. The 'amok' had sprung upon him from a thicket like a 'badi'¹ and only his speed had saved him. With his 'liver cold' and his heart thumping in his mouth, he had run and as he was twice Ngah's height, he had fortunately run fast enough.

After enjoying this recital and the additional information that the 'amok' had a thirsty kriss, the bravest of the men armed themselves with long poles, forked at the end, with

¹ A badi is an earth-bound spirit.

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which they could hold off the killer, so that he could not use his knife. They made their way, cautiously, towards the forest, where the 'amok' would hide until in the dusk the workers returned from their far-away fields. Among these, he would find fresh victims, but a runner had gone to warn the police. Soon they would come in their motor, with guns, but they would try to take the man alive, for that is the way of the Dutch.

"I can't let the police have him," said Henri.

"How are you going to stop them?"

"I'll manage it somehow."

We spent fantastic hours on the edge of the forest. Fortunately the undergrowth was so dense that even Henri could not penetrate as far as he wished. But he called the 'amok's' name and spoke to every bush as if it hid a fugitive possessed by terror.

I do not think I have ever been more frightened. The movement of a creeper suggested to me an invisible madman, waiting to spring. Where the light caught the flat surface of a leaf I saw the kriss, thirsty for blood. I died at least a dozen deaths while we pushed our way along an overgrown trail, and when a spider fell upon my neck, I think my heart literally ceased to beat. If I had been capable of screaming, I should have brought the whole village on our heels. As it was, I stood stock-still, while the heavy-bodied insect scrambled down my shoulder and slid into the grass. Then, with an agonized leap, my pulses resumed their functions.

It seemed to me hours before the light failed, after which every shadow ran 'amok' and the forest animals stalked us with slow stealthy movements duplicating our own. We could hear their breath and the soft padding of their feet. Sweat ran down my face and my legs trailed all over the place.

Henri, his cheek laid open by thorns, but entirely self-

possessed, said : " We must get back to the village before the police arrive." As we retraced our steps, he added : " The night will give him confidence. He will not wait much longer."

I found the idea far from comforting. But nothing happened till we reached the end of the lane which wound between the deep-eaved houses. In the grey sheen heralding starlight, sharpened by gleams from various apertures, we saw a figure wavering against a wall. At first, I thought it was a shadow. Then a man's voice yelled the word 'amok.'

I had imagined the road deserted, but here and there retreating shapes rushed for the security of their houses. A door crashed beneath the weight flung upon it. A pig squealed as a woman hauled it over a threshold by its tail. Unconcerned, a child tottered into the middle of the lane. Ngah drifted towards it and the infant paused to pick something out of a rut. I shut my eyes. But nothing happened to the child.

When I forced myself to look again, it was still concerned with the treasure it had found in the mud. Ngah was coming nearer, I could see his small, closed face and the thing he held.

" Get into the car," said Henri's voice beside me. " Start the engine. It's all right."

I remembered then that we had left the car, which suffered from every known disability, behind a shed. It could not have been more than twenty yards away, but if I moved, I should run. I should never stop running.

While I hesitated, steps sounded in a passage between high walls. They came on steadily. I could not see who made them, until a man debouched into the lane just behind Ngah. He paused, and before his surprise could change to terror, the 'amok' turned and sprang. The kriss went deep into the

man's chest and, simultaneously, Henri, precipitating himself upon the Malayan, dragged him from his kill.

I waited for no more. With an appalling feeling of limbs weighted and organs out of place, I scurried for the car. By a miracle, the self-starter worked. While I turned the machine in the direction of the bungalow, Henri came running, with Ngah in his arms. Tearing open the door, he bundled the Malayan on to the back seat and flung himself beside him. "Go on—drive!" he said. Even then I noticed the dead quiet of his voice.

With a screech of gears and a protest from every spring, I succeeded in getting the car to move, but I had no idea of the track. Stones spattered against the mudguards. We bumped into holes and crashed out of them. A wall of darkness rose in front of us and my foot jerked from the accelerator.

"Can't you see the corner?" asked Henri as coolly as if it were a matter of negotiating a one-way street in New York.

"I can't see anything at all," I retorted.

For answer Henri made as if to get out of the car, which had come to a standstill with one wheel sunk in vegetation and the other at an unnatural elevation. But I shrieked at him: "You can't let go of Ngah."

"Why not?" retorted Henri, still unconcerned. "He's all right, now he's got rid of that damned kriss."

I suppose I stared, although I could see little except the white of the Frenchman's clothes. I don't think I asked anything, but Henri replied to my thoughts: "I don't suppose he even knows what he's done. Look at him. He's all in."

Turning, I craned over the back of the seat and there was Ngah in a heap on the floor.

"Left it in the body, of course. The only thing which mattered was to get Ngah away from it."

While we bucketed into the darkness, Henri explained that, nine times out of ten, an 'amok,' deprived of his weapon,

regains his senses. He kills while he has the means of killing in his hand. "But when it goes, his strength goes with it. He is as a child waking from a nightmare, not knowing what is real and what is false. Is that a moment to thrust him into a gaol and call him a murderer?" concluded the Frenchman.

I said I did not know, for, in my mind, I retained the clearest possible picture of the unsuspecting labourer coming suddenly out of the passage with a sickle across his shoulder and the next instant the crumpled-paper effect of him as the kriss went into his heart.

I said also that we must have passed the turn to the bungalow, for the car was clambering over rough ground without sign of a track. Trees leaned down and clawed at us. Shadows heaped themselves into hillocks. Cavities yawned and when I thought we must fall into them, they changed into rocks, for the starlight played with shapes, inverting them for our dismay.

"We're not going to the bungalow," said Henri.

There was a pause, during which I wondered whether there could possibly be a to-morrow. Then the Frenchman explained: "Ngah stuck to me when I was consummately up against it—that's your way of saying it, isn't it? Well, now I've got to get him away and I can only manage it by taking him across the mountains so that he can go down to the coast where he's not expected. There are lots of native boats about. I brought some money. With it, he'll have no difficulty in crossing to one of the other islands."

Henri was becoming more and more of a surprise. He could not possibly be the man who had sickened at the sight of the flayed Tamil. Instinctively, I said: "What about you?" and then I wondered what I meant.

"I shall be alone," said Henri in French. It sounded excessively solitary.

That is how it happened that I came to spend a night, or

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the latter end of a night, as much in his arms as circumstances allowed and altogether too much for my peace of mind. For, after a shattering progress, during which the car behaved like a young steer bucking in the scrub, we disposed of Ngah. In chastened mood, he started down a trail that we could hardly see. But he walked surely, saying there was a village below.

"They have an instinct," said Henri, leaning on the wheel.

When the Malayan passed out of sight and there was no longer any sound among the bushes, I remembered that he had expressed neither concern nor gratitude. I said as much to Henri and he replied: "Between us, there is no need of thanks."

He looked utterly exhausted. We sat in silence, while I wondered vaguely what would happen. Then he turned the car and we climbed perilously across a ridge. The downward track comprised all the elements of a cataract, except water. I stuck out my feet and seized the edge of the door.

"We'd better wait till it's light," said Henri. "Then we can make for the road. Ngah will have had a good start and the police won't look this way."

We found shelter under a tree. The branches made a tent and the earth was soft. Henri dragged the seat cushions on which I lay so close to him that I could hear his heart beating.

When he woke the sun was high and we realized our condition. Henri rubbed his chin and I would have given a fortune for a comb. We were both very hungry.

In daylight and in full possession of our senses, we looked at the descent which I had compared to a cataract. "Well, I suppose we've got to get down there somehow," remarked the Frenchman.

"Yes," I said, "unless you'd rather walk."

A ROMANTIC MAN WITH A KNIFE

"Walk! My dear girl," retorted Henri, and I wondered why I had found him so sympathetic.

We did 'get down somehow.' Henri's description had been apt. It seemed to me that we strewed a good deal behind us as we went. In any case, it took us a couple of hours to patch up what remained. Fortunately, the road was where Henri said it would be and we were able to buy plantains, coffee and meal cakes at the first houses.

Towards sunset we reached the village where Ngah had run 'amok.' Groups of men stood in the street. Their discussions ceased as we approached. Aloof, rather than surly, they answered Henri's questions. The police had arrived. They had gone up to the plantation.

The Frenchman was not satisfied with this information. What exactly had the police asked? To which bungalow had they gone?

The details he sought seemed to me unnecessary. "All you've got to say," I told him, "is that you captured Ngah with the intention of shutting him up. On the way to your house he escaped and we spent the night looking for him." It seemed to me a foolproof story, and I could not think why Henri hesitated.

"Yes, I could say that." He sighed as he turned the car into the atrocious road which led to his friend's bungalow. Without looking at me, he said: "You must get out of this. Jean will put you up for the night, or better still, he'll lend you a horse. It's an easy road to the English plantation. You could be there by midnight."

"Why should I go?" I protested, thinking of washing. There must be a bath in the very new bungalow inhabited by the taciturn ex-soldier.

"There are reasons . . ." said Henri. Then he turned to me: "I want you to go."

I remember, to this day, his smile which held defeat and

something else. It may have been pride or that consciousness of having done the only possible thing with which a child in disgrace confronts its elders.

"All right," I said, remembering a moment under the tented tree.

Henri Laurent spoke once more before we reached the bungalow. Where the bush gave way to rank grass, he took my hands, turned them palms upward and kissed them. "I've always loved your hands," he said, and in the same sentence, so that the words rushed one on top of another: "D'you remember how I told you about ugliness being a crime? It is the only one that cries for punishment."

He pressed my hands to his eyes as if he would blot out a sight that seared them. "It was so ugly. I couldn't bear it. Remember, won't you? . . ."

Tired, cross and unwashed, I rode back to the English plantations. On the way, I indulged in an orgy of self-pity. No doubt I hoped that something would happen to me, so that a graceless Frenchman would be suitably stricken. But the road was good and I arrived in much the same condition as I started.

Next day I heard that Henri Laurent Cocteaux had been arrested for the murder of his wife.

It had happened in Malay. The woman had had a lover and her husband had found them together. It was this, I imagine, which had been too ugly for him to bear.

He had used the kriss with the jewelled handle. It was famous in the neighbourhood and, finding it missing, the police of the Federated Malay States had added its description to that of the missing Frenchman and the servant who had fled with him.

Neighbouring authorities were asked to make enquiries. "I can't think what induced the fellow to leave such a damnable bit of evidence sticking out of a body, even if it wasn't the

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body for which he was wanted," my host said in considerable excitement.

"He only thought of getting Ngah away from it . . ." I began.

"I can't understand it at all," interrupted the Englishman.

I could, because for a few hours that had no ordinary limits, I had known the man who lived with dreams and gods.

The
Zebra Men
or
The Escape-Merchant of Devil's Island
FRENCH GUIANA

FROM the air, the Brazilian jungle had the appearance of thick green worsted. Here and there a worn patch in the material would have been a clearing had we been flying low enough to see it. Leaning between the clouds, I could distinguish, through glasses, the greyish threads that were paths leading from one isolated hut to another. Sometimes there was no sign of a dwelling for a hundred miles. Then a few crumbs dropped into the solid pile of the forest resolved themselves with the help of binoculars into long-eaved, thatched shelters in which the bush blacks, with Indian and African blood in their veins, lived self-sufficient in the twilight of immeasurable forest.

From the air, I imagined I could thrust my fingers knuckle-deep into the soft, rich stuff, brocaded of so many different greens, but when the pilot dropped a few thousand feet to search for scarlet ibis the jungle leaped to meet us. It became a straggling mass, no longer diversely green, but bursting into flowers, their colours as violent as the forms of the great twisted branches, the parasites and the creepers that hung heavy on them. As we skimmed over what was now a tumultuous sea swelling into breakers of blossom, hundreds of brilliant petals detached themselves. They

were more vivid than flame, redder than red ink in sunshine. With wings outspread, the unbelievable birds drifted gently over the tree-tops, so that, for a moment, the forest seemed on fire.

Then we climbed again and the clouds caught us. The assistant pilot came into the cabin. "We have crossed the frontier of French Guiana and soon we shall make a half-circle out to sea. It is not strictly correct, but you will have a glimpse of Devil's Island."

The Pacific, tenuous as spun sugar, faintly gold, hung below us, and floating on it was a shape that seemed to have no permanent existence. It was humped into more definite form where rocks slipped down to the curiously luminous water. I thought I could distinguish palms and a row of grey cottages not unlike the crofters' dwellings in the north-west of Scotland. Anything less grim than this sweetmeat floating on a sea of sugar can hardly be imagined.

Beyond, sunk in the golden haze that made everything unreal, were two other islands, Île Royale and Île Saint Joseph. On one of them, I knew, were the dreaded 'seclusion' cells, erroneously attributed to the Île du Diable.

"Are you satisfied?" asked the pilot as, towards midday, he landed on the river highway of French Guiana. "I broke all rules for you. You have flown over Devil's Island——"

"And discovered the fraud."

The sunburned young man raised eyebrows as spruce as the rest of him. His very blue eyes mocked me.

"There is no prison there," I said.

"In the usual sense of the word, no, but I'm not sure if the political exiles who have followed Dreyfus to those cottages would agree with you. I believe they relieve their boredom by fishing, but they do not get away. It's curious. There are quite a lot of escapes from the other islands in

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spite of their rigours—and let me tell you there's no exaggeration about the seclusion cells on St. Joseph—but nobody has ever got away from the Devil's rocks."

"Politics smother initiative," I suggested, and then we all clambered out of the seaplane on to a stage anchored in mid-stream. A woman offered us hot cocoa. It was then eleven in the morning and the heat of the tropics weighed on us like a blanket soaked in oil. Yet she was a remarkable woman, a Swede, I think, very large and blonde, and a first-rate mechanic, with the best business brain in the colony. When I couldn't bear the prison atmosphere any longer I used to go and dine with her in a room high above the square, with a dozen or more windows, all of them unshuttered, and she would talk about engineering or economics while I listened, soothed and emptied of emotion, to the church bells or to the heavy monotonous flop of the vultures descending to scavenge in the gutters.

Cayenne, the little township huddled between the beginning of the jungle and the last waves of the Pacific, appeared to me as pleasantly provincial. I knew that it was the capital of French Guiana, the forecourt, as it were, of the largest prison in the world, but it might just as well have been a sleepy village in the Midi, for the convicts who wandered dreamily about the streets doing nothing and doing even this as slowly as possible, wore vastly striped pyjamas, red and white. Their heads were protected by straw hats nearly as large as cartwheels. Their rope sandals made a soft slither on the pavement. It sounded like ripples dragging at a sandy beach. Whenever I looked out of my window in the hotel I saw one of these hollow, brilliantly striped creatures spending his unfortunate leisure by watching the vultures who hopped on one leg in the most ridiculous fashion, with wings outspread, too gorged to rise, or else with chin sunk and bare toes scrabbling one against another

so that their owner looked knock-kneed, watching nothing at all except perhaps some private process within himself.

The hotel-keeper soon became my most intimate friend. He had, I suspect, left France for the good of his neighbours, but I don't know if he had ever been in gaol. He was enormously fat. His belt with difficulty supported his stomach, and when he walked the whole of his body shook gently like a jelly insufficiently set. Moisture exuded from his small, deep-set eyes and from his thatch of dark hair which stood upright suggesting the bristles of a very expensive brush, but he had an amusing smile which slipped about among the folds of his face so that one never knew where it would next appear, and he was surprisingly active in chasing hens out of the bedrooms where they invariably roosted.

The ground floor was an estaminet with a bar at one end of the long room and a billiard table at the other. Above were half a dozen bedrooms opening on to an echoing corridor full of hens. At one end of this rose a structure reminiscent of the guillotine, but it was really a shower-bath. When anybody attempted ablutions under the perilously swinging bucket which always upset at the wrong moment, the proprietor used to wobble upstairs and, bent as nearly double as his shape permitted, stare through one of the many cracks in the boarding, while, breathing gustily, he offered pertinent advice. "Pull in the other direction, Madame, not so hard ! You are too much to the right ! Softly now. The colour matters nothing. I assure you the mud here is very healthy. Ah, it sticks ! A little jerk now. Ah-ee !" as a crash echoed through the whole building, for a bath always ended in the same fashion, 'unexpected' only by the proprietor. "*Voyons*, it is the fault of that animal of a *libéré*, who always misplaces the bucket, but I have iodine. One will apply it at once ! There is not too

much damage done?" Most guests preferred to remain unwashed.

Next door to the hotel a barber displayed a cheerfully striped pole and the portrait of an unctuous blonde with sausages erupting all over her head. He also became a friend of mine and I found his information most useful, for he had served six years in an inland gaol and was now enduring the 'doublage' which is, in most cases, the worst part of a sentence to Guiana. For in prison the convict is sure at least of food and shelter, but when he is liberated he has to remain in exile within the borders of the penal colony for a similar period, or for life, if his sentence exceeds seven years. If he has friends to send him money, he can make for himself some sort of existence, but all labour is supplied by convicts and there is no work left for the unfortunate *libéré* who can barely keep body and soul together. If he happens to be a technical expert, he may be able to find employment, but the ordinary criminal, accustomed to live on his wits, finds himself with no choice but to steal in order to get back into prison, or to starve.

My friend the barber explained all this without self-pity. "For," said he, "I am an exception. You see that at once. I make money. I save. The ladies, they could not do without me. Even Mademoiselle Antoinette, the daughter of the Governor, and what a beauty, comes to me. I make her those curls all down the back of her neck which so enchant the young Monsieur in oil who will no doubt be her fiancé."

Everybody in Cayenne was described as being 'in' some natural substance, oil, tobacco, pepper, or sugar, according to the nature of his occupation.

"And how," I ventured, "did you happen to be sent out here, for you are, as you say, possessed of most exceptional qualities."

The stilted compliment pleased him. With a flourish of

the tongs with which he was preparing me for lunch at Government House, he exclaimed : " Ah, Madame, it was a quite small affair, a thing that might have happened to any-one—you yourself, for instance, although one sees you are a lady of heart and intelligence."

" Yes, yes, of course," I said confidentially, " and how did it happen ? "

The barber sprang away from his lamp like a grasshopper. If he became any more excited, I thought, he would leave the floor altogether. " Figure to yourself, Madame, the misfortune, the disillusionment. Twice I tried to shoot my wife's lover and twice I killed the wrong man ! "

With tongs raised, he waited for my condolences. I hoped they sounded hearty. " Evidently it was not an ordinary crime, that—" concluded the little man, springing lightly round my person, dusting combings, flicking off the more pertinacious insects, never still for a moment.

When I reached Government House the first thing Mlle. Antoinette, ravishing certainly with her blue-black hair close curled on her neck, the bloom of a very sophisticated sixteen on her absurd and delicious face, and a mouth composed of pomegranates and hibiscus, said to me was : " They all say they've murdered their mistresses. It is a respectable crime." She added that she did not like the striped " zebra-men." " They exasperate me. They get on my nerves, and what a bad red in those stripes ! One could have been artistic at least ! "

Antoinette was ripe for mischief. If the young man in oils did not bestir himself, she would make more trouble than all the assassins who composed the household put together.

We went in to lunch. Madame, very brown, smiling and effective, sat in the middle of the burdened table. His Excellency, more reserved, sat opposite. The three daughters

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arranged themselves as near as possible to the sweets they preferred and they all had the healthiest appetites.

Madame talked gaily over the beheaded flowers in great heaps of red and yellow down the table. "All our servants are assassins. We prefer it so. For with a thief one never knows. At any moment he may begin to steal again. But with a murderer once is usually enough. It is finished and one knows where one is." She nodded her brisk, dark head and took a second helping of the superbly cooked fish offered by an Annamite with a face like a locked box. The small secret olive-skinned man went round the table carrying the big dish decorated with petals, and the eldest daughter, helping herself liberally, said: "All the same, Maman, one must remember they do sometimes make a nuisance of themselves. You recollect when the kitchen boy tried to kill the cook and that one escaped with the blood pouring out of his head! Where must he go, pursued by the scullion, but into the little Georgie's bedroom? Imagine, Madame, my small sister waking up and finding one about to kill the other over the rosebuds on her counterpane!"

It needed some imagination.

"What did you do?" I asked the stolid child, less attractive than the other two and rather red after a mixture of strong condiments.

"But what do you think? I told them it was not possible. If they were determined on an assassination they must find a spot more suitable." With head bent over her plate she ate quickly and neatly.

"You are greedy," said her mother with affection.

"No, but I do not waste my food. It is good and there are not many good cooks in the Guyanes."

At my elbow stood a slight brown man offering steak garlanded with orange and yellow vegetables. When I found it needed cutting he took the knife from my hand.

His eyelids, satin-smooth and fringed with soft lashes, hid his eyes. His lips were gentle and very young. I wondered in what manner he had killed. Then I saw how he held the knife and there was no need to wonder any more.

The eldest daughter soon showed that she possessed a strong character. Her name was Louise and she reminded me of her imperial namesake with whom Austria paid tribute to the throne of France. Like her mother, she was plump and immensely energetic, but there the resemblance ended, for Madame was tolerant and intelligent. Her gaiety came from a fundamental vitality which carried her splendidly over all obstacles. But Louise, I suspected, was narrow as well as forcible. She had little imagination, but she knew what she wanted and went straight for it.

When I asked permission to go into the interior, beyond the borders of the penal colony, to the new land with its attractive Indian name that France, with the aid of hundreds of peaceful little Annamite convicts, was forcibly tearing from the jungle, Louise said at once : "It is better, Papa, that I go with her."

Somewhat disconcerted, I studied the smooth, pink and white young woman with well-arranged yellow hair and a body far too developed for her age. She would be of use, I thought, when practical comforts were concerned, but what should I do with her—on high heels—in the forest?

"Do you like walking?" I asked.

"I never take a step if I can help it," she replied.

But I had not fathomed the resources of the cool, honey-coloured Louise. The first thing she did was to commandeer the greater part of the local bus which ran inland for some forty or sixty miles from the river bank—nobody seemed to know the exact distance. "You must get up at five—no, four will be better. Then we can meet at quarter-past one

the quay." The margin for washing and eating seemed to me small, but with the assistance of the proprietor, who, breathing in stentorian gusts, shook me awake about three, I succeeded in reaching the river with the dawn. There was nobody there. An hour later, several officials arrived to see us off and we made awkward conversation till, about six, Louise, looking like Britannia in a sun helmet, arrived in a car laden with provisions. "It occurred to me that we should take a mouthful with us," she explained.

Tensely, I agreed. We embarked in an official launch. Several young men, unshaved, but with suits freshly laundered, took off their pith helmets and wished us fervently *bon voyage*. In half an hour we reached the spot from which the bus should have started. It was not there.

"What a surprise!" said the magnificent Louise.

I'd never seen such a bosom in starched pink and white cotton.

"It must have gone hours ago," I retorted with the utmost gloom, but Louise thought this improbable and she was right.

A crazy wooden estaminet hung above the road. On it a couple of Frenchmen were engaged in the local pastime of killing time. They were not even drinking. One of them called to us that the bus had not yet arrived. The other added that there was no hurry as the priest who would certainly travel on it had just this minute been called away as there had been 'a little accident.' A child had chopped its foot in half while trying to split sugar-cane.

Towards nine the longed-for vehicle arrived and a swarm of blacks and browns poured into the back of it. Social precedence demanded that Louise and I, not to speak of the priest, should have seats to ourselves. Besides which we had paid our fares and brought a good deal of luggage. So a violent argument ensued. At least it began in violent

fashion with the two Frenchmen and Louise laying hands on the nearest natives and pulling them out head first, but when the priest arrived the whole matter was raised on to a spiritual plane. Father Bénoit's manner sufficed to arrange everything.

In time—when we had long ceased to look at our watches—we started, the priest, Louise and I, and the half-caste wife of a French warder, on the two front seats. For hours and hours—I haven't the faintest idea how many—we drove through pleasantly civilized forest, by which I mean that the vermillion-red road, deep in mud, ran gaily between green walls, but green walls broken by clearings where red flowers bloomed round delicious thatched huts and other red flowers sprawled over pigsties and the verandahs of tin stores. On those verandahs sat fat women with sewing machines and thin men in new canvas chairs.

"It is all very grand, is it not?" said the priest. "Look especially at the names and the pictures on those tins of foods piled underneath the tin roofs!"

Louise proudly explained, "It is progress, yes? Some of those men are *libérés*, but I prefer the blacks. They are better to look at and they have not the prison smell."

Midway to the next river the road plunged into real forest and came out again in a swamp. "Here are the outer walls," said Père Bénoit in a charming, cultivated voice. "Beyond these, few can escape."

I noticed some water-buffalo wallowing in slime and the priest pointed to them. "Those animals know how far it is safe to go, but men are not so sensible. Fear drives them into these marshes and they never come out."

He sounded kind and sad, so I took advantage of the moment to ask, "But they do get away sometimes, don't they?"

"From the north, not so seldom as the officials would

have you believe," replied the priest with a touch of malice. "Many convicts are employed in timber camps far out in the forest. They are to all appearances free, and there is only the river between them and Dutch Guiana. They try to cross it at night on rafts or tree-trunks. Some of them are drowned, some shot by the guards, but without doubt some get away."

"What happens to them then?" I asked, before Louise, who evidently disapproved, could interrupt.

"They die of starvation in the Dutch jungles which are just as cruel as ours, or they are killed by poisonous snakes, or they lose themselves and go mad, or—if they are very hardy and very fortunate—they make their way to some bush village, and in time they become respectable citizens in one of the mining towns. Not so long ago an escaped convict used to keep the best hotel on the Paramaribo river."

Louise intervened with, "There is no reason why they should escape. If they behave themselves they are better off here than in any European prison. Imagine, there are twenty or thirty in a ward. They can read and play cards, smoke, drink if they have enough money to buy the local wine, pay their two sous for a cup of coffee and make as much conversation as they like. Yet they are criminals, remember, most of whom are fortunate to have escaped the guillotine. You must agree, Father, that only the very bad come here."

The priest looked at us gravely. "I ask myself often," he said, "if one can say of any man 'he is very bad,' or only 'at that moment he acted very badly.'"

And then the bus stopped. The red road had come to an end beside a river. Immediately below us an unwieldy craft with a great spread of sail was approaching the bank. A warder in khaki with a revolver at his belt sat in the stern. Half a dozen zebra-men, striped red and white, acted as crew. One of them leaped ashore, and amidst a storm of directions

from the warder, he and the others sought to bring the boat round so that we could get into it. When the sail came down, confusion seemed to be complete and I found myself balanced on the extreme edge of the bank, held upright by the largest convict, who gripped my hand with unexpected force. Louise was already on board, so that when an eddy caught the boat and sent it a few yards downstream I was left with the enormous young man and the certainty that in another minute the earth under us would give way.

He also realized it and with an embarrassed apology he pulled me on to higher ground, and there we stood staring at each other. I saw a broad face, hairless but for a suggestion of eyebrow, with strongly cut, definite features and no lines on it at all. For this reason it seemed particularly clean and it was lit by pale blue eyes that looked surprised.

“ You’re not French, are you ? ” I asked.

“ No, ” said the man in a quick suffocated voice, “ I am Polish. Do you know my country ? ”

When he spoke I noticed that he had a beautiful mouth, hard, but not bitter. Altogether he would have been rather impressive had he been wearing anything but ludicrously striped pyjamas several sizes too small. Perhaps he was aware of their inadequacy, for he pulled the coat, from which two buttons were missing, across his chest, and instead of saying anything important in this rare moment when he must have known he could communicate with ‘ the world,’ he stammered : “ I shall get into trouble. Some *crétin* has stolen my buttons—— ”

The warder’s voice came to us, unnecessarily harsh, and in another minute I had clambered into the boat, assisted by officious arms. The huge convict followed, looking uncertain.

While we fought our way across the river, with wind and tide against us, I set myself to please the hardened individual

in a particularly ugly shade of khaki, and he thawed sufficiently to tell me that he had been fifteen years in the country, that he had a wife—from Blois—and two daughters, and that he could spend alternate Sunday afternoons with his family, providing the convicts did not make trouble. If he had been able to relax the unpleasant rigidity of his features, I should have felt more sympathy, but he appeared, perhaps of necessity, to have become a good deal cruder than the criminals among whom he had spent the equivalent of a life sentence. I was glad when we landed on a sandspit and an immaculate youth, with white suit neatly pressed and hair oiled till it looked like silk, came eagerly to meet us.

“What luck, Mademoiselle Louise!” he said, shaking her hand as if he would much rather have kissed it, and I realized at once why the Governor’s eldest daughter had decided to accompany me inland.

“Let me present to you Monsieur Jusserac,” said Louise, not in the least disconcerted. “He is the agricultural expert attached to the prison and he will give us lunch.”

Followed by the convicts carrying our luggage, nine-tenths of which consisted of Louise’s ‘mouthful’ of food, we walked along a soft mud track, deeply red, between neat wooden houses inhabited by warders and other prison officials. Flowering trees hung over us and petals were strewn upon the road. In the distance we could see our destination—the famous, or infamous, Penitentiary of the Rocks, where hardened offenders are sent. But before we reached it Jusserac said: “Here is my house and my dog and, more important, my cook. Ah, what a trouble I have to keep him, Mademoiselle Louise. Every woman in the place has tried to take him from me, but I shall appeal to your father. I cannot lose Bernard.”

He led us across a strip of garden to a three-roomed bungalow looking on to the great, flat rocks of the estuary.

Waist-deep in the water beyond them, some Annamites, naked to the loins, were fishing with nets which they threw, fan-shaped, upon the surface and allowed to sink before they pulled them in.

“Is there no danger from sharks?” I asked.

“A great deal, but the Annamite is not afraid. Give him a knife and he will defeat the biggest monster between here and the islands.”

“They are convicts?”

“Yes, but one can hardly think of them as such. They are so quiet. They make no trouble at all.” He paused to offer us drinks.

“For me,” said Louise with decision, “I should like a purge. I do not feel entirely comfortable inside.”

The young man showed solicitude but no surprise. “It is the country,” he said. “Madame perhaps should have one too. It is wise before travelling.”

Hastily I refused, and with tender consideration Jusserac prepared a dose for Louise, who had removed her helmet and looked admirably pink, white and yellow.

In a whitewashed room we sat round a table trimmed with marigold heads. The inimitable Bernard cooked and served a meal worthy of Larue’s, but such minor efforts did not prevent him from entering into and indeed dominating the conversation. Even Louise was no match for him.

“Madame is from London? That is where I shall go when I am free—in one quite little year and a half. That will soon pass, *hein*? It is not that I have suffered here. As the best cook in the Colony I could take my choice, and I despair to think of all those who will miss me, but one must make one’s career, is it not so?”

I ventured to ask what slight accident had interfered with the same career in France.

The round, red-faced, good-natured man shrugged his

shoulders. "Monsieur knows that," he said. "*Eh bien*, when one is young one cannot always avoid making a fool of oneself!"

While he went into the pantry for a condiment on which Louise, very sure of herself, insisted, our host explained: "He is not really a criminal. He drank a few glasses too much during a fête at Marseilles, with the result that he knocked some stranger over the head with a bottle. The man had the bad taste to die and his father was a municipal official with influence. But Bernard will go back to France with savings in his pocket, and as for us, our stomachs will suffer."

After lunch we 'reposed ourselves,' which meant that I dutifully lay upon a camp-bed and stared at the flies on the ceiling, while, in the sitting-room, the other two amused themselves with an odd mixture of childishness and decorum. Then we went to see the farm, or rather the lands spreading for miles into the jungle on which the prisoners were experimenting with cereals, fruit and the breeding of water-buffalo under the enthusiastic guidance of young Jusserac.

It rained, I remember, in the wholehearted fashion of the tropics and I disliked seeing convicts drenched and shivering, their hats turned into soaked sacking, their ludicrous pyjamas glued to their bodies. I wondered how they got dry.

"When they return to gaol, about six or seven, they take off their clothes."

"What do they put on?"

"Nothing," said Jusserac, surprised.

At sunset we made our way up to the stark buildings on the rocks. Within the wall were several bungalows occupied by the officials on duty. The largest was reserved for the Governor, who, as well as ruling the Colony with its large native and half-caste population, its Arab and Indian traders, its bush-blacks descended from run-away African slaves, its Chinese and its Indians, is the final Court of Appeal for some

20,000 convicts scattered over several hundred miles of forest gaol. The bungalow was surrounded by wide verandahs and a thicket of hibiscus.

"There is only one thing that I want," whispered Louise, with a white face.

"But yes, Mademoiselle, it is there, look!" explained Jusserac, solicitously indicating a kiosk at the end of the porch. I heard him murmur: "I have had it so well arranged." And then Louise left us to return a moment later with an expression bordering on anguish.

"It is locked and there is no key!" she cried.

"Ah, that is too much!" exclaimed Jusserac, and he repeated it when it was discovered that the convict responsible for the arrangement on which Louise's admirer prided himself was now safely locked up for the night. Jusserac, however, was not to be defeated. "The walls are not so high. A chair, perhaps," he said. "The condemned can help."

In French Guiana it is bad form to talk of the prisoners by any other term than *les condamnés*. The thought of several damp and wizened *hommes-zébres*, as she called them, respectfully hoisting the Governor's daughter to the seclusion she so much desired while her admirer directed the operations proved too much for me. Helpless with laughter I took refuge in the bedroom allotted to me. It contained a table with a tin basin and jug, several domestic utensils not usually displayed, and an iron stretcher bearing a flock mattress, the hardest blankets I have ever felt, and a pillow like a porcupine, for a good deal of the straw stuffing protruded through the cover. When I entered, I found a gentle old man in the ubiquitous stripes wandering around with a posy of half-dead flowers. He gave them to me with a vague smile, after which he offered me a bath. "But it is not very safe," he explained, "for it will not keep up. It is better to stand outside while you pull the rope."

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With memories of the hotel bath I said that I quite understood, and the old man, who looked as if he had no flesh left, leaned against the table and watched me while I unpacked pyjamas and a tooth-brush. I asked him how long he had been in Guiana.

"How should I know?" he said. "Ten years at first, then another ten, for there was a fight in prison and a warder was hurt—"

From the way he said it, I imagined that the word 'hurt' was a euphemism and that it probably resulted in six foot of tropical earth for the official, and at dawn, the guillotine flanked by rows of sickened, resentful men, kneeling in the wet mud that added to their humiliation.

"I was not in it, but I had a knife—" continued the small dry rag of a creature whom I can hardly think of as human.

"How did you procure it?"

His eyes held a child's slyness. "They make them at the forge when the warders are not looking, and the handles come from one of the carpenter's benches. It is not so difficult, that. But to get a knife through the gates one must bribe the keeper, who is himself a *condamné* promoted for good behaviour. They search us each day as we go in, so—" He ran his skeleton hands down his back and sides. "But if the gate-man is a friend, he takes care not to feel along the spine, or under the thigh, and there the knife lies safe as an infant unborn."

The grey man looked as if he would like to smile, but had lost control of the necessary mechanism. He moved the basin an inch nearer the edge of the table. "That was long ago," he said. "I have forgotten how many years. Now I am on good behaviour. I look after this bungalow and I can pick the flowers." Wistfully he looked at the drooping bunch I had forgotten to put into water.

Ashamed, I arranged them in a tumbler and, still more

ashamed, I asked : " Will you tell me why you were sent here ? "

" Oh, that was a quite little affair, Madame—the smallest possible assassination."

I don't remember much about dinner that night. I think we ate dried fish and buffalo meat downstairs in a barren room looking on to bushes and a multitude of fireflies. But afterwards there was some argument as to how we should sleep. Louise, less assured, suggested we should share a room, but I thought the flock mattress would be sufficient obstacle to repose, and I insisted on her occupying the state chamber which contained a surprising amount of rotund enamel ware.

" I shall not close an eye," she protested, and I knew she envisaged a succession of *hommes-zébres* crawling along the verandah to steal, slaughter, and ' even worse than that.'

" There isn't anything worse," I said coldly, and young Jusserac looked at me with contempt before coming to the rescue of his beautiful, golden beloved who was twice his size.

" But, Mademoiselle Louise, I shall be quite near—almost at your side."

The girl blushed.

" Pardon me, I mean I shall, of course, sleep on the verandah. So you need have no fear. And I will give you my revolver. Or would it be better that I kept it myself? Then you could call to me if you were disturbed and at the least sound I would fire."

Louise did her best to express speechless gratitude, but her eyes, though magnificently shaped and coloured, were strangely reminiscent of a codfish.

Sighing, I resigned myself to an impossible night and Louise completed my gloom by saying : " Madame, since even after Monsieur Jusserac's courtesy, it is improbable that I shall sleep, you can rely on me to call you. As soon as I can see, I will knock on the wall."

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"Now why on earth," I protested coldly, "should we start so early? It is not much more than a hundred miles to Sinamari."

"It is better to be prepared," insisted Louise, shutting her ridiculously small mouth as if she held in it an unexpectedly succulent morsel, and Jusserac, who had decided he must accompany us in order to inspect some agrarian enterprise on the way back, hastened to agree with her. "Yes, yes, one must always be in advance of the hour."

I went to bed. The mattress defeated me. It was like trying to relax on a potato heap. So I put a rug on the floor and rolled my coat into a pillow, and while I still wondered if I could possibly snatch a few moments' sleep, I heard sounds that I attributed to Jusserac's revolver. But it was only the old convict shaking the shutters without daring to push them open.

"Madame, madame, you will not wake and the bell has rung this long time. Mademoiselle and the young Monsieur have gone to pick bananas for breakfast and there has been a little disaster with the bath, but the big Pole is even now mending it, and if Madame finds herself so dirty that she must wash, he or I can hold the tank on the beam—but he is much stronger than me—so that Madame can have a shower without fear for her head."

"Thank you a thousand times," I said, "but perhaps a little water here will suffice."

Later I thought I might as well inspect the bath, so I crossed the garden, where enormous green insects sat on their hind-legs and waved their whiskers or dried their wings with what Louise called their 'front paws.' In a mud cubicle, with a tin tub balanced on a beam under the roof, I found the enormous Pole who had formed part of the boat's crew, struggling to produce a shower. From the appearance of his head, I gathered that he had made one or two mistakes.

"Good morning," I said, and immediately, without returning my greeting, the man thrust his hand into his pyjamas and produced from some hiding-place that was not apparent a sticky scrap of paper.

"You are going north," he said, and mentioned the name of the largest prison settlement on the mainland. "It is so? Yes?"

I nodded.

"Will you give this to a woman for me? Take it quickly. It is nothing. Ah God, I will bless you."

In spite of his emotion, the man's face remained peculiarly expressionless. It was so fair and open it should have belonged to a Swiss peasant.

Mechanically my fingers closed over the note. "Who to? Where?" I asked, for there was no address.

"Thomasine. You will find her without difficulty in St. Laurent."

"But Thomasine who?" I asked, with my heart pounding and visions of a lifetime in prison.

"There is only one. Do not ask the French. Address yourself to any *libéré* who is not playing stool pigeon to the authorities—be on your guard against that—and he will take you to her. Marie and the Saints be with you!"

It occurred to me that it was the first time I had heard a religious invocation in Guiana. Without haste, the Pole resumed his work. He had shown far less emotion than I had, yet this, I suppose, was his one chance of communicating with the woman he loved.

For a moment I stood in the doorway wondering how he had met her. Perhaps she had followed him to the prison colony. Such devotion deserved the utmost reward. I longed to know all about the man, but I could not possibly have asked him why he was in the Penitentiary for, not the blackest sheep, but for those certainly whose wool verged on a

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dark brown. Alone among the prisoners I had met, he showed no signs of the demoralization habitual among men deprived, in the tropics, of women, of privacy and of any activity which ministers to their self-respect. He had not become soft. He was not in the least afraid. I decided that nothing should prevent me from seeing Thomasine and I would tell her that she could still be proud of her man. Perhaps in return she would tell me what it was all about.

An hour later we started for Sinamari, whither Père Bénoit, in whose house we were to spend the night, had preceded us. In order that the young people could continue the flirtation in which they delighted, I said I would sit beside the warder who drove the lorry. His assistant—a convict—protested that I should find it very uncomfortable, but I thought Louise and her young man might as well have the enclosed portion of the vehicle to themselves, while the mechanic balanced upon the tailboard. So we started, and after a few miles the road became a matter of hillocks and potholes and the convict shouted that his stomach was weak and he could not stand so much movement. He jumped down and ran beside the lorry, insisting that he must share my seat.

“ Try you sitting on the back, Madame. You will find you have no inside left.”

But I was unsympathetic. “ You are a man and ten years younger than me. I don’t see why you’re making such a fuss,” I said, and with the permission of the warder, I gave him some cigarettes. Almost crying, he retired to the back of the lorry.

While subdued laughter came through the waterproof curtain behind us and Jusserac’s voice saying, “ *Voyons, Mademoiselle, you will be more comfortable with my coat behind your back—like this, so !* ”, the driver, who was young and intelligent, explained : “ That sort of *condamné* is soft as goat’s butter. He is a bad type, but there are no

charges against him and perhaps he has not had a chance. For—if you will excuse me, Madame—the old men get hold of boys like that and make pets of them. As soon as they come out, they are spoiled. The old men work for them and lie for them. They manage to get them small privileges. They give them money and take the blame for their offences. It is an ugly system and what can one expect of it ? ” Angrily he drove the lorry over a succession of hillocks and knocked a donkey into the ditch. A murmur of amusement penetrated the curtain. “ But always it is not so ugly. For I have heard of an old man who loved a boy, a weakling, and they were together in one of the forest camps. The youth could not manage an axe. He was lazy and clumsy and the warders were always abusing him. The old man used to do as much of his work as he could and so he kept the lad out of serious trouble. But when the rains came, the *mône* got malaria, and since he wasn’t going to put in a stroke more than he could help, he groaned himself into hospital on Île Royale. Without him, the old man went to pieces. He could not endure the emptiness of his life and yet he could not die. He could not even get sick until a fellow-convict made him a present of castor-oil seeds. You know, Madame, these are poisonous if introduced into the blood. Well, *le pauvre vieux*, determined to get into hospital somehow, cut into his wrist and forced some of the seeds under the skin. In a day or two the hand festered, but he said nothing. He waited until the whole arm had gone. What courage ! Then he showed it to a doctor. They sent him to Île Royale and they operated at once, but they could not save the arm and the old fellow got a spell of ‘ seclusion ’ for self-mutilation, but he did not mind, for at last he had news of the boy. He was able to send him money, and when he had sufficiently bribed a turnkey who had himself been a convict, he was promised a sight of his pet. Ah Madame, it is not a nice story. The boy had died weeks ago of malaria

and those guards were taking the old man's money and feeding him on promises that had nothing behind them but a grave."

It was, I agreed, a horrible story and I reflected on the system responsible for it. Apart from the climate, always too hot or too wet, the insufficient and monotonous nourishment, supplemented by those who could afford it with cheap and often unwholesome tinned stuff, bought at an exorbitant price, and above all, the lack of women essential to the latitude and the Latin temperament, I thought a spell of Cayenne might be preferable to incarceration in a French gaol. But, apart from the brutality of the double sentence, the latter half of which means freedom to starve, the French Government does not repatriate those criminals who have served their sentence and survived the equal period of exile. They must pay their own fares back to Europe. If they do not possess the necessary money, Guiana is sufficiently hospitable to provide them with a grave.

Some such ideas I confided to my neighbour. He considered them for a few minutes while he drove from the twilight of the jungle, through which the road twisted like a coral snake, into the misty sunshine diffused over the swamps, so brilliantly green and flaked with a fluff of white reeds. "It is not entirely the fault of France. My colleagues when they arrive are decent men, disciplinaries perhaps, but with goodwill towards the *condamnés*. Daily they are antagonized by treachery, cowardice and malingering. The men don't mean to work. They won't try. All they want to do is to cheat and steal and fight each other, and as soon as they've saved a few hundred francs they attempt to escape. Then the warder gets his pay cut. Without doubt there are a few bad officials. There may be one or two who take bribes because they're underpaid, because they have families and can't afford enough food for them. There are others whom unlimited authority makes cruel, but generally, if a convict has a hard time, it is

because he will neither work nor obey. He wants to go on living the easy, lawless life to which he has been accustomed and he ends up in an eight-foot windowless seclusion cell with no sound but the footsteps of the guard whom he cannot see."

We arrived at Sinamari towards dusk, for we had had several punctures and the magneto had given trouble, while the road had on occasions disappeared altogether in an expanse of scarlet mud which Louise insisted would engulf us, probably for the pleasure of being reassured by young Jusserac, who remained uncreased until he left us a few miles from the river which would be the high road to the new inland state of Inamari. In the dusk then, heavy with scent, the smoke of native fires and the flicker of bats' wings, we drove into the straggling village, saw the dim shapes of huts crouched under their shaggy thatch and the outlines of a few whitewashed buildings determinedly superior, and, following the river bank, came to the neat and homely dwelling of Père Bénoit. His housekeeper, a native woman with many starched skirts, a cross upon her breast and her grey hair tormented into an imitation of European fashion, rustled out to meet us, explaining that her master was in church; within a few minutes he would return. Meanwhile supper was cooking; there would be a bottle of good wine and we must see our rooms wherein she had put everything we could possibly require.

It was true. The rooms were pleasant and clean. We found a sufficiency of soap and candles and there were no holes in the mosquito netting. Having ejected a frog, three beetles of inordinate size and the fiercest appearance, and a centipede nearly as long as a ruler, and having failed to dislodge a family of bats from the rafters, I went downstairs. Louise and Father Bénoit were sipping a cordial and talking about the church, of which the priest was architect and chief mason. "We quarry the stone ourselves," he said, "and hew it into the right-sized blocks—you cannot think how clever my people have become.

I stand there with my spirit-level and a piece of string and the walls go up higher and higher every day. We have erected a building complete with windows and the beginnings of a tower with no more science than a plummet, a ruler, and a ball of twine." Triumphant Father Bénoit emptied his glass. "The Government refused to help me. They said I hadn't enough parishioners. But I said to myself, 'first the church, then the congregation.' And already I have my flock. It is their church, their own, for they have built it themselves, and as such, it is worth more to them than a state cathedral." Later, while we ate, with avidity, the excellent omelette, the stew, delicious but probably of feline origin, we spoke of the *condamnés* whom we had left behind at Les Roches and should find again in greater numbers at St. Laurent. "The *doublage*, yes it is sometimes cruel," reflected the priest, "but it was intended to give a man a chance to re-establish himself. The majority of convicts are not fit to return to a civilized country as soon as the prison door opens for them. Listen, Madame, I have been asked so often to give work to *libérés* without a blot upon their prison record. From the description of Monsieur the Director one would think they were angels with every feather whitewashed." Père Bénoit smiled, showing strong square teeth. He picked them effectively as he continued: "Twice I accepted them as servants. The first ran away with the offertory, pennies and halfpennies, mind you, contributed by these poor savages, and the second sold the few spare clothes I had and all my hens to a rascally Syrian going and 't the border."

few hureed that these particular experiments had not been very gets his pl. but I asked, with an earnestness that amused There may 're there no exceptions? It is a fearful indictment underpaid, bec. if everyone goes bad under it."

food for them. down his empty wine-glass. "The old makes cruel, but g and they in turn take pride in destroying

what is good in the boys who come out here with only one idea—to escape. It is the truth, Madame, that among all the *condamnés* I have seen, there is not one of whom I could say 'that man I can trust.' For there is something which eats into them and destroys them. They go soft like this fruit."

He held out an over-ripe alligator pear.

I was tired. The front seat of the lorry had been all that the driver predicted. Conscious of an aching back and knees still stiff, I said to Louise : "I suppose it doesn't matter what time we start to-morrow," for we were going up the Sinamari river in a cement barge with an outboard motor.

" You won't be able to sleep through the Angelus," she retorted, " and that is at five. I believe *mon Père* rings it from his bed."

In darkness I went up to my room under the rafters. The bells were exactly overhead. Perhaps, I thought, the good Father would oversleep. Something furry scuttled across my feet. Something else squealed and slithered along a beam. Resigned, I lit a candle and sought for the long-handled broom which the priest's housekeeper had provided for such emergencies.

The bed was comfortable and I rolled myself away from the netting so that no vampires—those small bats with a wing-spread of twelve inches—could make a meal of me while I slept. It was deliciously quiet. Not a sound came from the lane that separated the house from the river bank. Then crash, clatter, bang ! The bells were pealing over my head. Five o'clock ! Bewildered by the clamour, I blundered on to the floor, stubbed my toe on a loose board and looked for my watch. It had stopped.

By the light of a candle I dressed. It seemed to me unusually dark, yet the sky, where a handful of stars lingered, was fortunately clear.

Louise, neatly brushed and powdered, but, I suspected,

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unwashed, had drunk most of the coffee by the time I descended. "You are late," she said, "but here are your eggs and some bananas. We will take the rest of the bunch with us."

I objected to this habit of hoarding food, but Louise always replied: "One must make provision," so we travelled surrounded by paper packets, bags and bottles filled with alien liquids.

Father Bénoit was saying matins, or whatever is said before the dawn, so, having adjured his housekeeper to express to him our gratitude—I noticed mine was much more fervent than Louise's—we set out along the river, still in darkness.

"What *is* the time?" I asked impatiently.

Louise did not hear. She was talking to the boatmen who protested, with respect, at the amount of packages for which they had to find place. However, we settled ourselves at last on top of the cement bales, and after several false starts, the outboard motor consented to function and we went chugging upstream. It was delicious as the night withdrew, leaving a faint sheen on the water and a suggestion of heavy veiling between us and the jungle, which, with a thousand small sounds, began to separate into animal and vegetable entities.

After we had done a few miles the sky turned green and against it the palms looked like smoke. Parrots screeched across the river. Curiously shaped animals came down to drink.

"I can't understand it at all," I repeated, feeling like Alice in the Looking Glass. "It must be seven now and the sun hasn't risen."

Louise, imperturbable in spite of the cement which was harder than anything else I have ever sat upon, said: "The dawn comes late here."

For a while I considered the statement, wondering for

how many more phenomena the tropics would be responsible, but it was not till an hour later, watching a spectacular sunrise, that I realized what had happened.

"Louise," I said coldly, "at what time did you persuade Père Bénoit to ring the Angelus?"

"Madame!" she protested, and then with a pout: "Truly, it was so little earlier than usual and you must avow it is exquisite now on the river."

I had already paid tribute to Louise's strength of character and I was beginning to realize that she had a way with her as well.

We spent the whole of that day upon the cement sacks and the river only changed with the light, but when I could see clearly I became aware that among the native boatmen, who perched like crows upon the side, was a European figure in a mackintosh and battered helmet. He turned out to be a prison doctor on his way to the Annamite camp at Inamari and he relieved the tedium of the journey by discussing convict psychology. With the guile of serpents, I was prepared to direct the conversation towards the big 'Polonais,' whose letter lay at the bottom of my pocket under a powder-puff, some chocolate, and a pair of sun-glasses.

But Louise asked straight out, "Tell us about the good-looking young man at Les Roches, the big one, I mean, who is not French."

"He is not so young," I suggested.

"No, but he has a look of youth."

It was the first time the girl had shown that she saw convicts except as an inevitable portion of the landscape.

"They say he is a deserter from the Legion," said the doctor, with some reluctance. "He has the appearance of a good type, but he has too much force. He gets into trouble."

"*Voyons*, doctor, we are not children," said Louise. "Tell us what you mean."

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"I cannot tell you what I do not know, but the other *condamnés* are afraid of him. He half-killed an old wretch whom he found trying to steal some little possession, and he would have completed the process had not the warders interfered. That is why he is at Les Roches and the officials do not like him. He works all right, but"—the doctor smiled grimly—"they cannot get him down."

When I protested, he said : "Here one does not encourage originality. The sooner a man's spirit is broken, the better for himself and everybody else."

During the next few days we saw the beginnings of Inamari in the form of great clearings torn out of the forest. We saw a town growing in the middle of the jungle, a town built by hundreds of blue-bloused Annamite prisoners guarded by a few dozen Senegalese. We stayed with a couple of young French officers upon a hill stripped of vegetation and from our huts looked out over unending green, vast billows of it rolling south-west to the frontiers of Brazil, north to the mysterious Orinoco. With the two cheerful young men who thought nothing of creating a new country, we penetrated a short way into the jungle and saw bush blacks living in contented isolation, proud men and free, who wore clothes only when they swaggered down to one of the coastal townships and, magnificently muscled brutes, well fed and armed with bows or spears, they elbowed off the pavements the white prisoners whom they regarded as trash. And in time, back down the Sinamari River, we went to the tame lands along the Pacific where every village had its Arab trader coining money out of natives and French officials. For the Arab and the Corsican are the only breeds which make a success out of deportation. They stick together, helping each other. The Corsicans have their particular form of masonry, and because there are gaolers of the same blood, they can count on a good deal of influ-

ence. The Arabs always make enough money to return to North Africa. Very often they are paying the penalty for a relative's crime. It is a family matter and they receive sufficient funds to live well. They become farmers and traders during their period of exile and, as they consider themselves an interdependent community, they carry weight in the markets and the councils of the coast. No Arab will allow a fellow-Moslem to starve, and if he becomes attached to a foreign convict, that one also will probably find his way back to 'the world.'

In due time Louise and I returned to Les Roches, and during a brief moment while he let my bag drop and picked it up again, the Pole was able to ask me: "Have you been to St. Laurent?"

"Not yet," I said, under my breath. "Next week, I think."

The following morning, when we went down to the boat, we found him waiting for us with a few carved ivory birds. The convicts are allowed to make such trifles in their spare time, and those of them who are momentarily 'on good behaviour' peddle them in Cayenne or along the main roads.

Louise stared at the big man and told me afterwards that he had beautiful bones. She was no mean observer and could judge shape as well as any man at the Royal. I bought a peacock and on an impulse thrust two hundred-franc notes into the Pole's hand. I wondered if he would accept them, for they represented twenty times the price of the bird. With somewhat cynical amusement I watched them palmed into a temporary hiding-place. At the first opportunity they would be rolled with any other paper money the man might possess into a lozenge-shaped tin receptacle about three inches long, the like of which each convict carries in his body. For his own flesh provides the only safe and secret bank for a *condamné's* account.

When Louise had been restored to Government House, I went north again by the coast road to St. Laurent. The insignificant white town is dominated by its prison and there are others scattered along the borders of the forest. Here, it seemed to me, the *condamnés* were grimmer and more despairing than in Cayenne. I avoided the groups drifting about the streets on some vague duty, or marching, with shoulders bowed, in front of an armed warder and I sought for a *libéré* in such distressed circumstances that he could not possibly be earning an official salary for spying on his fellows. It was not a difficult matter, for the ghosts of men who had been thieves and murderers in another life haunted the bank of the great river which separates French and Dutch Guiana. In their colourless rags, with faces as thin and of a universal greyish yellow, drained of blood, covered with dirt and insect bites, they resembled dead leaves and they moved as aimlessly. I selected one in whose eyes remained a glimmer of intelligence and offered a few francs for information concerning Thomasine. The result surprised me. Disbelief I had expected, for no convict relies on any promise, but I was startled by the avid curiosity that ran like a flame over the man's face and as quickly disappeared. He asked no questions. He said only: "This night. Eight o'clock. Behind the church of the Franciscans," and went. I did not think he could move so quickly.

Committed to the enterprise which now appeared to me extremely doubtful, I made my way in gathering darkness to the rough ground behind the only building whose size challenged the prison. After a while the *libéré* shambled towards me, but before I could speak he was off again at a pace which I found difficult to imitate. One behind the other we left the town and it was uncomfortably like following a shadow into the middle of a nightmare. By this time I was afraid of everything, even the banana trees whose

leaves crackled in the breeze and whose trunks, half seen, assumed the most unpleasant shapes. By the time we reached a thatched hut like a dozen others I had seen, but standing alone between papaia trees and the beginning of the forest, the least I expected was a cut throat, but still I wanted to meet Thomasine. She must be remarkable to be loved by that colossus of a man who had defeated the whole system of deportation and lecherous Guiana as well.

No other explanation had entered my head. I expected to find in that hovel, which showed no light, a French woman young and, if not beautiful, at least sufficiently original to justify the devotion of the one prisoner whom the Devil's land had failed to demoralize. In fact, I waited to be impressed.

But when my guide, shivering in the hot and cloying night, had satisfied himself that nobody was about and instead of approaching the door had knocked upon a shutter in a manner suggesting a signal, there was a pause during which I imagined we were examined, although nothing moved and there was still no sign of a lamp. Then the shutter opened sufficiently to allow a woman to lean out, with arms upon the sill. I could not see her clearly, but if the *libéré* had appeared shrivelled beyond any normal age, this scrap of humanity might have been the grandmother of Time. In connection with her, years meant nothing at all. I could not believe that she had ever been born, or would ever die.

In the clipped patois used by convicts, she spoke to the *libéré* and he said something which I couldn't understand, nodding in my direction. Without moving, she asked me what I wanted, and I explained that I had a message for Thomasine.

“From whom?”

She used the dialect which to me was almost incompre-

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hensible and I answered in French : "From a prisoner at Les Roches, but I must speak to Thomasine herself."

The woman exchanged a few sentences with the *libéré* who looked as if he would like to obliterate himself. Then they both spoke to me at once and I distinguished the man's husky "Give the message to her." But I would not trust the creature who, due to the combination of time and circumstance, I really expected to fall into a heap of bones or just cease to be there at all, so impossible and unreal was she in starlight under the grotesque shadow of the papaia.

"No, no, I must see Thomasine," I repeated.

Both of them seemed afraid of the name. The woman made as if to close the shutter and the man, afraid of losing the promised francs, stumbled a little nearer to me, saying : "She is away, but I promise you, I swear to you she will hear whatever you tell to this one." He nodded towards the half-seen figure at the window, but I would not believe him. I remembered some words of the Governor : "They cannot speak the truth. Even when it is most essential to them, they are unable to say a true word. It would make them ill." He had shrugged his shoulders and continued : "The first thing one must expect is a stupid and unnecessary lie, with others to follow."

So, after an argument which seemed to interest nobody but myself, I would have gone away had not the woman mentioned the word 'Polonais.' If she knew this much, I thought, she might perhaps be trusted with the letter and I had no other means of finding Thomasine. But I wanted to know about her. Who was she? How had she come to St. Laurent? She could not surely be the hag's grandchild. It was ludicrous to think of the wizened creature, similar in colour and texture to the wood upon which she leaned, as ever having given birth, but she might once—an inconceivable time ago—have been French.

With an effort to find the right words she said to me suddenly in the slang of the Cannebière, what amounted to, "You will make a pretty hash of your fine young man's affairs if you do not give me his message," and she left no doubt as to our supposed relations.

Hastily I thrust the note into her hands. "It is for Thomasine," I insisted.

With a muttered imprecation at my lack of understanding she closed the shutter. The *libéré* hurried me through a banana grove, but he would say nothing. With the first lights he left me and that, I supposed, was the end of the affair. It had been most disappointing. Only an unusual amount of beauty or pathos would have repaid me for the terrors of that journey where I imagined a sentry in every dark place and a challenge whenever a branch cracked. During the following weeks I was fully occupied with my own business which was sufficiently nefarious, for, as I related in *Women called Wild*, I crossed the forbidden river between the Guianas—by night in a canoe manned by blacks—and, knowing quite well that both my objective and the manner of my journey were illegal, I pursued those half-Indians, of Saramaca origin, who are called People of the Flame, through the jungles of the Dutch colony until, lying in a swamp somewhere near the frontiers of Brazil with half a dozen forest Indians and a negro from the coast, I saw them dance in fire and come out of it unscathed. *We* were not so fortunate, for the black and I were nearly drowned in live mud. Then we all lost our way and could not find the boat we had left carefully quilted in creepers on the bank of a stream. But at last, having wandered into a Saramaca village where they gave us food and a certain amount of information about the human salamanders upon whose flesh fire seems to have no effect, we were set upon a path invisible except to the Indians and shown in which direction lay our particular

stream. Because I insisted on wearing boots, while the others went barefoot, we made slow progress and by the end of the day I imagined my spine broken. Not another yard could I go, bent double under creepers lined with thorns. So the Indians, untiring, went ahead to prepare what they called a 'road' for the morrow, while the negro and I established ourselves with our backs against a tree and prepared, upon a provision of chocolate and damp meal liberally mixed with mud, to defend ourselves, he against the ghouls which he insisted were always to be found in thick forest and I against the local 'tigers' that might only be jaguars.

The hours dragged. Arrow beetles made a great deal of noise as they blundered into our tree. A grave-bird above our heads emitted sounds that would have been more fitted to All Souls' night in a churchyard. Altogether, we were both badly frightened when a real noise, by which I mean an inexplicable one, began very stealthily within a few yards of us. Something large and heavy was undoubtedly approaching.

The negro gripped my arm and we sat immobile, trying not to breathe, till, with a surprising paucity of sound, the thing, whatever it was, emerged on to the path we had cut.

I had a torch and a revolver, but no desire to use either, for, in picturesque language, the coastal black had told me what inhuman creatures preyed upon the jungle. However, something had to be done. The grave-bird shrieked and fled. The beetles shuffled over the dry bark with the effect of a net dragged across shingle. Tremulous, I rose, and the negro immediately clutched my ankle. Fortunately this made me angry and I was less afraid when I managed to steady the light upon the cleft between monstrous trees burdened with a curtain of creeper and swollen into odd parasitical shapes. What I had expected I don't know, but

certainly not a large gaunt figure in the remnants of shirt and trousers.

"It is only an 'escaped,'" exclaimed the negro, showing sudden familiarity with the situation and contempt for its cause, but I remained speechless, for I recognized the Pole.

He, of course, could see nothing, and he could not guess how many human beings there were behind the torch.

I suppose in our ultra-civilized world one is very seldom faced with elemental rage, but in that brief moment I realized what it might be like to die under the hands of a savage. I don't know what I felt. It was too quick, for in a cold, still voice that I did not recognize, I contrived to say: "Don't be silly. It is me," and then with inelegant haste: "I sent your letter to Thomasine."

With a great effort I held the torch steady and I saw an amazing transformation. It was as if the man's features dissolved like a mask of wax over a hot fire and, under them as they peeled away, was another face with an entirely different expression.

"It is you," said the man in a bewildered voice. "But how? Why?" And then, avidly: "Do you know where we are?"

"Yes," I said, and his long arms fell to his sides, hanging heavily as if he had no further use for them.

In spite of the negro's attitude to all 'escapes' as he called them, I gave the Pole the rest of our unappetizing maize meal, and when I had explained how I came to be there, he sank down beside us without further question or explanation and in a few minutes he was unconscious. But it was the sleep of an animal ending before the dawn, and during the three days and nights that he remained with us I noticed that the least sound was sufficient to rouse him and that he awoke alert as a hunting-beast and ready for any emergency.

A few hours brought us to the boat, and then we had

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nothing to do but to paddle slowly along a network of streams till we came to the Surinam river. There was little to fear once the man had been fed and doctored, for his flesh was raw from thorns and stings, and there was no need for any physical effort. Through the hottest hours the natives lay about in graceful abandon and the Pole, baring his body to the sun, of which he could not have enough after the horrible twilight of the jungle, talked in a slow voice, always a little surprised. "This is not the first time I have run away," he said. "It has become a habit, for I cannot stay long in one place." And at intervals during the steamy days, while the boat drifted between purple lilies, he told me some of his story. His father had been a farmer near Cracow and he had intended his son for the land, but the boy had other ideas. He ran away from school to be a sailor, was caught and beaten into silence but not submission. At nineteen he ran away again and joined the Foreign Legion. With them he had good fighting in Wad Zis and the Atlas, but he did not like road-making. After three years he had had enough of a particularly dull war which meant an endless sojourn in a blockhouse and the shooting of Arabs at long range from behind bullet-proof walls, so he decided to desert. With a friend and two rifles he made for the Riff, which was still unsubdued. The friend died; how was not satisfactorily explained. The body was found by a French patrol, who followed the other deserter to such good purpose that in spite of his two rifles and before he reached the shelter of the mountains, he was recaptured.

"There was a war on," acknowledged the Pole, "a fake affair, but I suppose it justified a charge of 'desertion in face of the enemy,' and they accused me of killing my friend in order to sell both rifles to the Riffs. That was the worst offence of the lot. I got ten years, and that is life."

At another time, he told me how he had studied the ques-

tion of escape and how he had decided that most of the failures were due to hurry. Money one must have to bribe the bush blacks to take one by paths only known to them through swamp and jungle, then across the frontier river on a moonless night. After that, one had to trust to luck. If one got safely through the forests of Dutch Guiana, one might get work in the manganese mines. They didn't ask many questions there. "Because of incidents," continued the big man, sitting loose-limbed in the bottom of the boat and looking up at me with his curiously light eyes, "I had difficulty in getting on the 'good behaviour' list, which generally means work on the land or in the forest with its comparative freedom, but I had a little money and I didn't spend it on tobacco or coffee. I lived like a monk, worse I should say." The faint reflection of a smile slipped across his face. "At last I was sent to one of the timber camps near St. Laurent. There I had friends. The officials do not know what a good postal service we have——"

"H'm," I said. "And who exactly is Thomasine?"

The square face, smeared with sunburn, lost its expression of childish frankness. "I am so grateful to you! God knows I shall always bless you——" said the man, and I, blinded by my own vision of a girl in love, did not press him further. I had been one stage of the underground post, the old woman, whom in broad daylight I could think of as human, another. Thomasine should remain a mystery.

During those three days the Pole and I discussed many things that had nothing to do with the Legion or French Guiana, but there was never any friendship between us. I had probably saved the man's life, for when he escaped from the neighbourhood of St. Laurent, he had paddled up the river for several days, making for the Brazilian border. Then his black guides had grown sullen. They had insisted on landing in Dutch country, and after conducting him to

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a forest village they had decamped. With the little food he could buy and incomprehensible instructions as to paths, most of which did not exist, he had started north-east in the hope of striking a tributary of the Surinam. Within a few hours he was lost. He never saw the sun and he saw too often the tracks he had made on previous days, for he blundered in circles, unable to judge distance or direction. On the verge of starvation, with bleeding feet and skin in rags, he fell upon us—and I knew that if we had not given him food, he would have taken it. Nor could we—short of murder—have prevented him coming with us, for the Indians were small men, afraid of violence, and the bush black alone would have been no match for the fugitive.

Until we approached civilization in the form of a mining camp, or a party of prospectors, I could not even force the man to leave us, so, day after day, we sat in the middle of the boat with the natives grouped at either end and we talked of economic conditions and the alteration of the German-Polish frontier, we exchanged tales of the famous Legion, for I had stayed in the posts south of the Atlas on the edge of the scarlet Hamada desert, or else we fell into a stupefied silence hypnotized by the slow-moving water.

At the time I must have been afraid, for I never asked how his fellow-deserter had died, nor how he escaped the rifles of the warders guarding the timber-camp. If there had been a succession of killings it was better not to know. But I made a mental note of the man's attitude, both to the Legion and to deportation. He was scrupulously just. Of the first he said: "We brought our own boredom with us. It was not the life that was unbearable, but we ourselves." Reflectively, he looked at the sky, palely blue and hard like the lashless eyes that expressed nothing but a faint greed. "Most of us hated ourselves, and when that hellish wind

blew and we ate dust, and our eyes and our tempers went bad, we hated each other, but it wasn't the fault of the Legion."

I had torn up a spare shirt to bind his feet, and for hours he would sit trailing them in the water, leaning back, so that his great shoulders rested against the other side of the boat, which was shaped crudely from a tree-trunk. His size oppressed us and the blankness of his face. Only his mouth was beautiful, and when he spoke, it became sensitive and rather terrifyingly expressive. Of the penal colony he said : " The work is possible ; it kills nobody. But there isn't a healthy man in any gaol I've seen. They begin to decay in the prison ship coming out. Imagine them cooped in cages in the hold and the temperature rising ! Every night they die and in the daytime those who have imagination go mad. The cages are half-empty when the ship puts into St. Laurent, and their contents are driven into gaol, and out again to work, wet to the skin or blistered under a tropical sun. The food is full of weevils and there is one blanket apiece for men shivering with fever, three planks for a bed and no chance of a doctor unless you are past moving. Only the strong, or the very cunning, can survive."

We spent the fourth night ashore, for I was tired of lying among peculiar substances, all strong-smelling, at the bottom of the boat, while things crawled across me and the Indians shuffled over my feet. There was a clearing by the river bank and signs of a recent encampment. We made a fire and cooked the contents of some tins. The Pole showed us how to fry the forest fruits that tasted not unlike bread. Then he sat in the shadows and ate slowly, with an occasional remark about his stomach which had certainly long been ill-treated. I thought how disappointed the bland Louise would have been.

" What will you do when you leave us ? " I ventured to

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ask, and he said: "I shall live—that is all, and never will I forget that you have made it possible."

"You will have to work," I suggested.

"But that is so simple. It takes little enough effort to keep alive."

"Will you go back to Poland?"

"Not yet. There is so much more to see."

At that moment the years were stripped from his face. He looked young and eager. And that is my last impression of him, for during the night he left us, disappearing silently into the jungle. He took with him a considerable amount of our food, my revolver and our only bottle of quinine tablets.

What happened to him I don't know. But in due course Louise's father was transferred to West Africa and after a year there he retired. I went to see the family in Paris, where, having means of their own, they lived in comfort and with some pretence to fashion. Antoinette had married the young man in oil. Louise intended to be a painter.

One afternoon I found the old man alone and it was not difficult to make him talk about Guiana. He said: "Soon I am convinced there will be no term of exile after the prison sentence. The natives who pride themselves on being Guianese and excessively civilized—you remarked the girls wear their sun helmets even at midnight in the middle of a dance!—object to the sight of *libérés* where there should only be cattle and grain. There is a strong nationalist party in Guiana and already they are politically conscious." The ex-Governor fanned himself with a silk handkerchief. "And think," he said, "at the beginning of the century women were deported as well as men. The convicts used to be allowed to marry while they were still in gaol. They were ranged in a circle, back to back, and the women would walk round outside until some man cried out that he liked the

appearance of that one or that, and when enough females had been chosen, a priest would marry off the lot of them. But all that is over, of course. There is only one woman *deportée* left in Guiana. Long ago she could have returned to France, but she had married, so to speak, a *libéré* and acquired land, out of which she made a remarkable amount of money." The retired official allowed himself a wink, so I asked for further details.

"Indeed, it is an interesting story," said the father of Louise, who was so relieved to have seen the last of the zebra-men, "and the woman must be an exceptional character. I could not tell you how old she is, but she was convicted of murder about forty years ago and she served her full sentence in prison. Now she lives near St. Laurent and her first *libéré* husband is dead. So, it is rumoured, are several others; but Thomasine continues to make money. She is a power in Guiana and the convicts are terrified of her, chiefly because of a legend that she is well over a hundred and will go on living indefinitely. What is the matter? Do you feel the heat?"

After Guiana, the question seemed illogical, but no doubt I looked as odd as I felt. "No, no, it's not that. But did you say Thomasine?" I stuttered.

"Yes, she is an appalling old crone who arranges all the successful escapes from our Guiana. That is why she is rich, but we can never get evidence against her. One must acknowledge she has imagination! One of her protégés got away from the invincible Île Royale lying flat on a door which he had stolen from the cemetery, with a buffalo skin on top of him. The sentries saw the horns drifting towards the mainland and wondered why there were no sharks about, but they didn't bother about a dead animal. Yes, without doubt Thomasine deserves her title. They call her 'the escape merchant.'"

Son-in-Law to Sappho

ECUADOR TO CENTRAL ASIA

SLOWLY and with no sound but the silken slither of the paddles we moved downstream. The water was tint-coloured and I could not tell which way it flowed. On either side the jungle pressed close over the banks. There was no break in the wall of different greens cemented by a mass of creepers and striped occasionally by tall silver trunks. High above our heads the branches which had been able to free themselves from the stranglehold of parasites spread luxuriantly in the sunshine and broke into fierce flowers, red, purple and golden yellow.

Other branches trailed over the river and on them sat crested iguanos. At first I had difficulty in distinguishing the great lizards from the bark which they closely resembled. They never moved. Dreaming and sullen, with pouched throats and a mane of wrinkled skin along their backs, they stared out of small deeply pocketed eyes at the river, equally motionless. I thought they looked like the gorged old men, expressionless and bored, playing for stakes that meant nothing to them at the highest table in the Salle Privée at Monte Carlo.

We had taken off our riding boots and put them in the other canoe. "It is safer so," said Jean-Jacques, "for one swims much better barefoot, and if we upset, I assure you it is necessary to swim very quickly. Otherwise the crocodiles get a free meal." They were really alligators, of course, but such

small distinctions mattered nothing to me while I was hunting the long, close-scaled beasts on an Ecuadorian river with a sharp spear thrown from an ejector, the spring of which did its best to dislocate my thumb.

The first canoe was a few yards ahead of us. Hollowed out of a narrow trunk, it so exactly fitted the hips of the two native paddlers that it accentuated every movement of their bodies. The combination suggested a large water-beetle scurrying over the surface.

In front of me, in the second canoe, neatly folded together rather than cross-legged, sat Jean-Jacques dressed in bathing drawers, a wrist-watch and a sun helmet. He was an Ecuadorian Spaniard with an ingenious philosophy. His friend, Filipo, crouching behind me and driving the canoe with long, deep strokes of a blade which he used as a knife, appeared heavy and indolent by contrast. Filipo was good-looking as a great, sleek animal, devoid of any ideas but physical satisfaction. He had unlimited eyelashes and a succulent mouth. Jean-Jacques treated him as a buffoon and made merciless use of his possessions.

I suppose I must have brought introductions to one of the young men, or, perhaps, some hospitable 'commercial' in Guayaquil had arranged a meeting. In any case, the two of them had decided to show me the tropical belt, that stretch of low-lying land, jungle, swamp and cocoa plantations, bordering the Pacific. For some days we had ridden gaily on and among a host of small ponies which ran like rats between the boles of trees and scuttled under outrageously exaggerated plants without putting a foot wrong. When we were tired of our mounts we changed on to others and the rest of the troop followed. At night we slept at plantation bungalows raised on poles above the insect-haunted marshes. If there were no beds we slung hammocks. We had one mosquito net between us over which we quarrelled every evening, but the

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haversack of the smooth, soft Filipo contained a number of lotions and unguents with which, by this time, we were liberally perfumed.

On our way back to the main river and Guayaquil, it had been decided that we must hunt crocodiles in the local fashion which certainly gave the reptile every chance, so here we were gliding down a turgid stream with the water heavy as oil against the paddles and the stillness of the jungle in mid-afternoon pressing against our ear-drums. Above the silence, which even in the hottest hours is composed of a myriad indistinguishable sounds, Jean-Jacques, sketching the correct movements with his paddle while Filipo did the work, talked with wit and imagination about the Catholic religion. "I do not know that I believe," he said, "except in authority," and at that moment the natives in the other canoe stiffened, so that the sunlight streamed off their oiled bodies, and the tensity of their backs and shoulders, in which every muscle was admirably developed, became part of our mutual expectation. We were no longer separate individuals. United by the lust of destruction, we were in one coherent entity, the hunt, the hunter and the hunted. For, where the river twisted back upon itself as if to escape the suffocating pressure of the jungle which here had thrown a napery of purple flowers across the water, a sand-bank thrust into mid-stream. On it lay several large alligators. One of them yawned as we approached and Filipo's spear, impelled by a magnificent co-ordination of poise and muscle, caught it in the throat. Immediately its elegant stream-lines dissolved and it became a flurried mass of scales and yellow flesh which looked unexpectedly soft and vulnerable. But its companions slid into the water. With a cry of warning, the natives swung the first canoe out of reach. The light settled now on the curve of their backs, bent and strained. The bloom of grapes clung to their skins.

Jean-Jacques' lethargy had fled. He no longer made adequate gestures with the paddle. He drove it violently into the water, making a great noise as he forced it round and out. The canoe quivered under the strain. At any moment I thought it might fall to pieces. "If we upset, kick about as much as possible." "Don't stay still," ordered my companions. Filipo, breathing down the back of my neck as he bent over his own stomach, added: "A twist of the tail is enough. Any of them could turn us over like an empty egg-shell."

Round the bend we swirled and out into deeper water. Jean-Jacques relaxed, leaning back against my knees. "A moment worth while!" he reflected. "But I'm not sure that I really enjoy killing." In an ecstasy of doubt, he conceded, "I am not sure of anything."

Under the farthest bank, a large dug-out propelled by half a dozen natives, darker skinned than those with us, moved lazily from light to shadow. "There's a European in it! I see him!" exclaimed Jean-Jacques, and a theological argument was averted.

We slid across the top of the water, and while our boats went on down the river, we engaged the attention of the 'party from the interior,' as Filipo at once described them.

The European turned out to be a lean youth with large bones who, even at that moment, gave me the impression of being more or less permanently angry. He was English and, when we asked where he came from, he replied 'Manaos.' Now when you ask the same question of an acquaintance discovered walking down a Lincolnshire lane, you don't expect him to answer 'Samarkand.' So even Jean-Jacques was momentarily bereft of words, for Manaos on the Amazon lay across the great Andes range and a thousand miles or so of the least delectable jungle inhabited by the head-hunting Jivaro and innumerable insect liabilities. But the angry

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young man spoke as if he had just strolled down Piccadilly into St. James's Street.

Filipo sensibly asked the reason for such a journey and the Englishman replied : " Rubber."

" But there isn't any here," said both Ecuadorians.

" That's what I mean."

" Oh," we said.

The conversation seemed likely to come to an end, but the stranger evidently thought it would save trouble if he explained, so he volunteered : " I wanted to get away from it."

" Why ?" I asked, pushing back the gigantic felt hat which one of the plantation managers had given me. It weighed as much as a tray and made my head so hot that I generally wore it like a halo balanced precariously above the nape of my neck.

" I make boots," retorted the Englishman.

" Here ?" I asked, bewildered.

" Of course not. In England. Nottinghamshire, if you want to know."

I looked at my friends to see if either of them were satisfied and then I became rather angry myself, for the young man, who looked as if he needed a great deal of washing and brushing, had not once smiled. We had really been very nice to him and we should have to be nicer still, for obviously he couldn't be left in the middle of the Guayas river while we found comfortable lodging at a farm, besides which we were, all of us—by comparison, at least—charming to look at and he ought to have appreciated us more. So, with unreasonable irritation, I said : " There should be a good market for boots in the forest—I understand everybody goes in full of clothes and hope and comes out barefoot with jiggers under the toenails."

The stranger said nothing. A streak of black hair fell across his forehead and he continually brushed it back with

the same quick impatient movement. I thought he was probably angrier with himself than with anyone else.

With elaborate courtesy, Jean-Jacques explained the advisability of shelter as the wet season had begun and the Englishman with a curt, "Thanks, I'll follow you," gestured vigorously to his natives. They got the heavier craft under way as we skimmed into mid-stream.

"I *do*, yes, I really *do*, believe in Englishmen," said Jean-Jacques reflectively. He explained that in moments of emotion, when tempted to disregard the importance of the material, he had only to look at an Englishman to regain his sense of proportion.

That night we all slept under the hospitable wooden roof of a cattle farmer. As usual the room into which I was shown contained two beds and a number of hammocks. An elderly half-caste scurried in and began making them all up. When I protested, she asked: "Is not the lovely fat *Señor* your husband?"

"Alas, no," I replied.

"Then it is the gentlemanly brown one, so elegant with his speech?"

Regretfully, I shook my head.

The old lady was evidently shocked. "It cannot be the young man who is already furious?"

I agreed emphatically that it could not be.

"No husband," reflected the philosophical dame. "Well, then with which *señor* does the lady wish to sleep?"

"None," I retorted and for the first time the good woman looked surprised.

We had an excellent dinner and some strong local drink, but the Englishman whose name was Richardson—he did not tell us any more of it—contributed nothing to the conversation. He said with relief that he could not speak Spanish.

Next day we picked up a steam-launch on the Guayas and

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before sundown we were in Guayaquil. On the quay I parted temporarily from Jean-Jacques and Filipo, but Richardson and I were bound for the same hotel. When we reached the adequate but somewhat barren building, there was, of course, nothing whatsoever to do. We had too little luggage to be able to make an excuse of unpacking. So we drifted into the lounge, which I remember as vast, austere and constructed entirely of marble. I don't think the chairs can really have been of this superlative, but unsympathetic, material. They did not, however, encourage relaxation, so we sat bolt upright in front of a table and exchanged commonplaces without looking at each other. Tea improved the situation. I talked about crocodiles. The young man said they were alligators.

“I know.”

“Then why d'you call them by the wrong name?”

“Don't you?”

“Don't I what?”

“Call things by their wrong names—it makes them more intimate.”

“I try very hard not to and I don't like intimacies.”

“That is obvious,” I retorted.

Suddenly my companion began to talk about boots. In half an hour I learned the essential things about him. First of all he did not get on with his father, a self-made man, prosperous and a strong Conservative. This seemed to me natural. So few young men nowadays are unfashionable enough to get on with their parents. Richardson—if I ever knew his Christian name, I have forgotten it—objected to profits. He thought an employer might be entitled to some interest on his capital, but not to profits. He wanted, of course, to reorganize the whole system of capital and labour. His father did not, and as there was a satisfactory and successful elder brother also immersed in boots, the youngest of the

family had been sent to the Amazon to study, in the shape of wild rubber, production at its source. "They wanted to get rid of me. That's all," said the youth from inside a tea-cup. They were very large cups and we were thirsty.

The conversation progressed as might have been expected and we were arguing, somewhat bitterly, on the limitations of the word 'socialism' when a woman came through one of the arches that led into the hall. She came quickly, but with no appearance of haste, and my companion stopped in the middle of a sentence. The woman was large and everything about her was the same colour. Hair, eyes and skin, all immensely alive, suggested a combination of sunshine and ripening grain. There was nothing violent in her appearance and no paint on her face. She held a battered hat in one hand and, with the other, she pushed back the hair, which curved, thick and heavy, about her brow. She was magnificent and covered with dust. I don't believe she had powdered her nose all day. Her skin glowed and a rich, damp sheen accentuated the quality of her flesh. Carelessly, she walked across the lounge and every movement suggested the effortless perfection of a circle. She did not see us. I doubt if she ever saw anyone not directly concerned with her purpose, but when she had seated herself, as if she had neither bones nor joints, in an enveloping chair, she looked round, obviously for a bell. Her glance passed over us, neither repelling nor inviting response, and I thought how satisfactory it must be to want nothing from anybody. But young Richardson leaped to his feet and I was startled by the quick grace of his actions. Until this moment he had been half asleep. "Can I do anything? Shall I get a waiter?" he asked with eagerness, and he smiled.

"You might order me a whisky sour," said the woman in an undescribable voice that seemed to be part of her body. Whatever words she said in it took on an unbearable intimacy,

while all the rest of her remained indifferent. I thought, "She's never loved. She's never hated. She's just lived. That's enough." I was wrong, of course, because the first thing I learned about Mrs. Carruthers was that she was a sculptor. She loved malleable clay. She worshipped form.

When the waiter came in carrying a blurred glass, I left young Richardson with her and I did not see them again till dinner-time. Jean-Jacques had come up to the hotel, as everyone did in the evenings, and we shared a table under a fan. Mrs. Carruthers came in with an exceptionally good-looking Spaniard. That he was in love with her I did not doubt, but she remained unmoved. A frown dug between her strongly marked eyebrows. She used her hands as if they held tools. We could hear a few words she said and they referred to her work. She was not satisfied with what she had done that day and consequently less than half of her sat down a few feet away from us and paid no attention at all to the Spaniard. Perhaps he bored her with his passionate interest, for when Richardson paused beside her table, his anxiety like a dark flame, she signed to him carelessly to sit down, after which she ignored both men.

Some time later, Jean-Jacques said to me : "I do not know why I ask you to dine, for you neither talk, nor listen, nor eat. You just look—and not at me."

" Well, they *are* interesting, aren't they ? "

" Perhaps. The Spaniard relies on his experience and he over-rates his position. The Englishman, who has, it seems, just come to life, is without any weapons at all. The lady, who knows, may make him a present of some and he will undoubtedly use them against himself."

" Tell me about her," I said and I stared shamelessly at the toneless, sun-gilt face, surprised to see lines on the forehead and round the eyes. What confidence the woman had, and she was justified.

"Arriago would like to be her lover. It would satisfy his pride even to be considered so, but she is an artist. No man could be her lover. The most he could achieve would be to minister for an inconsiderable period to the sum total of her experience. His flesh and blood would go into the clay she uses. Not a pleasant outlook for the young Richardson, is it?"

I had no apposite answer, so I made none.

Before we had finished our coffee, Mrs. Carruthers rose. With no change of expression, she dismissed the two men and went out of the room, walking as if neither people nor furniture existed, yet she made less sound than any of the bare-footed native waiters.

After she had gone, the place seemed so empty that I turned to Jean-Jacques in bewilderment. He answered my thoughts. "Yes, she is all that——" And then the young Englishman came up to talk about her. He could not stop talking.

Contentedly enough I settled down at Guayaquil. I liked the wide sluggish river on which the whole of the country-side drifted coastwards. There were rafts laden with produce, with hens and goats and pigs that sometimes fell overboard, and floating islands of weed on which egrets clustered. There were canoes shaped to fit their half-naked occupants, close as the shell of a beetle, and flat-bottomed boats on which reed houses had been built. Whole families lived on these, fishing most of the day and cooking under a lantern late at night. Heavy-breasted pelicans haunted the river, with a host of smaller birds, waiting to see what they could collect. And the forest crept down to the further bank. We looked always at its impenetrable greens.

When I think of those hot, steaming days, they appear to me as a background for Mrs. Carruthers and the men who surrounded her and from whom she would escape, impatient or indifferent, to the shed which she used as a studio. There,

presumably, she lived the life that mattered to her. We were trimmings, and as her one obvious ambition was to simplify her existence and to reduce her possessions to a minimum, we were perhaps a reproach to her exigeant taste. But none of us, men or women, could keep away from her. When the clay proved stubborn, she would talk to one or other of us, never about herself, but I think she preferred young Richardson, for she could do most to him. When he came to Guayaquil, he had not a mind at all. Sheelagh Carruthers gave him one and filled it to overflowing with ideas. Then she nearly killed him.

It happened in this manner. At her suggestion they went far up river, on the dawn tide and in Arriago's new speedboat. The Spaniard of course wanted to go too, but Sheelagh refused to take him, so he was forced to content himself with sending an efficient waterman who knew the currents and the dangers to be expected from driftwood. The inland journey was effected without mishap, but Sheelagh, inspired by sunshine and the brilliant colours, also by much satisfactory discussion about such subjects as individual responsibility and the relation of art to religion, insisted on taking the wheel when, with a full tide behind them, they started downstream. Her one idea of machinery was to get as much out of it as possible. With the throttle wide open, they roared along, avoiding by some miracle the masses of weed, timber and other floating refuse which cumber the river. They nearly came to grief on a drowned pig anchored to a drifting islet on which perched innumerable birds, but Sheelagh swung round it, heedless of submerged vegetation. Richardson, who hadn't many fears, but who revered and understood machinery, who was apt indeed to hear a *Te Deum* in the revolutions of an engine and to recognize divinity in a turbine, was beginning to breathe more freely, when they rounded a sharp corner and saw, within a few yards of their bows, a canoe about the size of a

banana leaf. A naked infant, wearing a hat considerably larger than himself, paddled it straight across stream.

Without a second's hesitation, Sheelagh flung the wheel round. The tide caught them and drove them broadside into invisible weeds. While the engine raced and the paddle became hopelessly involved, the canoe slipped out of reach. "That's done it!" said Sheelagh cheerfully. She used all her strength on the wheel. A blade snapped. The boat jerked forward and simultaneously a log careering downstream caught it full in the middle with the force of a ram.

The frail hull split and its occupants were emptied into the river. "Can you swim?" shouted Richardson, and the woman laughed at him without answering. She still laughed when the weeds caught her and she knew that, short of a miracle, she must drown.

Richardson had been flung clear. The tide took him and swept him out of immediate danger. When he came up, plastered with mud, hair over his eyes, he had a glimpse of Sheelagh struggling, her face only just above water. He went back, battling with all he knew against the stream. And the woman, finished as she thought, forced her chin above the current, and cursed him. He didn't even recognize the words she used, but I gathered they were forcible. When he told me the story, he said in a bewildered voice: "I swear she was laughing when she sank," and once, when he repeated the accusation to her face, she retorted: "Why not? I was angry."

"Do you always laugh when you're angry?"

"I don't know, but if I'm angry enough, I don't care what happens." She paused and her eyes narrowed. "I hope when I die, I shall be absolutely furious. Then I shan't mind."

At the moment when Sheelagh should have drowned, the waterman who swam like a fish came tumbling down the river

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on top of her. He lay across a board and let his body trail flat behind it. I don't know how he dealt with the weeds, but he got hold of the woman somehow and dragged her away. A hundred yards downstream they were flung together upon a sandspit with fragments of the boat. There Richardson came to them, exhausted and more frightened than he had ever been in his life. He would never be able to forget Sheelagh's face and hair as jetsam in the hold of the river.

The woman was unconscious. When she came round, she said : "Don't gape, Richard—it's not such an important moment." Then she was violently sick.

After this it was inevitable that we should all, in turn, ask : "What is important, then ?"

"What I feel, what I can put into my work, but drinking a lot of muddy water provides no inspiration." She laughed at us and said : "My daughter's important." That was the first we had heard of a daughter.

The girl arrived within the next few days. I don't know what I had expected, but certainly not a *jeune fille* full of prejudices, with a strong character, but no adaptability. She was mouse brown to her mother's tawny gold and she wrapped herself in a cloak of reticence as if it were her one protection against a world that had ill-treated her. Her mother thought her beautiful, but she was not in the least. She had good features and dignity. Her mouth was generous, but all the time she held herself in leash as if she never knew what was going to happen. It was evident that she worshipped her mother and was ashamed of her. I wondered how Sheelagh, who returned the girl's adoration in full measure, had contrived so to mishandle the situation. Then I saw the two of them with Arriago, who made no secret either of his passion or its objective. There had been too many men. The girl, identifying herself with her mother, felt she had been stripped by their predatory instincts. She could never get

far enough away from them. She hated them all except 'Richard'—we all called him by that historical name which suited his temperament, his inhibitions and his fierce, unformed ambition—and he was in love with her mother.

After the arrival of Maria, we had a brief period of peace. Sheelagh seemed to be less remote and Richard consequently happier. I never knew the exact relations between the woman of forty and the young man who might have been her son, but later, when the tragedy had happened, Maria said to me inconsequently: "It was odd that she so loved making images, for she could have made men. She made Richard. Didn't you notice?" Her voice ached. "Every day I watched him growing."

Maria and I used to sit on a wide porch overlooking the river and talk about England. The whole of the girl's being was concentrated on her longing to return. England meant security and a decent regularity composed of custom and necessity. She was too young, I thought, for such dull ambitions. Then she told me about her father, a west country squire, and the place which had been in the family for generations, and I realized that all her blood belonged to the land which her people served and from which, since Saxon days, they had drawn a hard living. Only by accident was she the daughter of a brilliant, heedless and richly gifted woman for whom the world was home and England an attic stuffed with inherited chaos. During those last days at Guayaquil I saw little of Sheelagh. She belonged primarily to her daughter whom she understood, but could not propitiate, and after that to Richard who needed the confidence and the powers of speech with which she endowed him.

"When I am with her," he said, "I see so clearly what I mean and what I ought to do.

"But one evening I saw her standing alone on the upper porch. I meant to speak to her, but she did not hear my foot-

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steps on the tiles. She was looking across the lacquered metal of the river and her whole body was at rest. She turned at last and, without noticing me, went away. The lines had been wiped out of her face. She was content because, for a moment, she had been in communion with the perfection of beauty. Whenever I remember her end, I am glad that I once saw her completely happy."

Next day we went to Quito, where a Liberal President had recently been elected by a large majority. Subsequently his own party had split into factions, and on the evening of our arrival the capital was threatened by a version of the ubiquitous South American revolution which, in nine cases out of ten, has little more significance than an election in England.

The hotel manager reassured us. "It will be bloodless," he said. "The students will undoubtedly make a great deal of noise, but the President-elect has issued strict orders. The soldiers will not use their rifles. Their officers can be counted upon to employ much tact." The neatly polished little man indicated unlimited appreciation of this quality, foreign, I thought, to most Latin Americans, and on the repetition of the word we went to bed, Sheelagh a trifle reluctant because, if there was going to be a row, she wanted to be in the middle of it.

Next morning it became evident that she would not be disappointed. We had hardly finished breakfast when the landlord came to beg us not to go out. We should be safe behind barred shutters, he insisted, and in the same breath announced that nobody was ever killed in Ecuadorian revolutions.

Sheelagh laughed. She pushed the smooth, hairless little man into one of his own chairs. Then she went into the street, bare-headed. Richard followed. No doubt he was enjoying himself, for he also considered a fight as free entertainment, Both were rebels, the man against specific in-

justices, the woman against tradition. With a certain amount of reluctance I discarded my first intention of seeing the revolution comfortably from the roof. "Come along," I said to the girl. "We might as well be in it."

There was no reply. Uncomfortably, I realized that Maria was afraid. "It's all right," I said. "Nothing's going to happen." But the girl interrupted my platitudes. She had unlimited moral courage. "We must go with them," she agreed. "Mother's never been afraid of anything in her life, so she's certain to get into trouble."

The door banged behind us and we saw the street cut sharply into sunlight and shadow. It was narrow and the white houses leaned over it. Iron grilles protected the windows. Behind them grew geraniums and other brilliant flowers, and beyond these again, half seen, talking in hushed voices, was a multitude of women. Each house had its hidden watchers, but the street was empty.

"I am nearly always afraid," said Maria in severely commonplace tones. "That comes of living with Mother. We take such unnecessary risks. We become so terribly involved—" She sighed, and in her stiff, immaculate linen, buttoned high to the throat, I saw her protest against the muddled contacts which, because of Sheelagh, she could not avoid.

I would have liked to have taken her arm, but I knew she did not want sympathy.

Round the corner we went into a pleasant square. The gardens were brilliantly green, the sky looked as if it had just been washed and the slender towers of the churches rose against it with the ephemeral delicacy of confectionery. Sheelagh and Richard were ahead of us, walking quickly. For a moment we saw them, individual and gay. Then they were lost in a crowd of young men who swept tumultuously out of a side street. Students taking French leave from the University, they were satisfied as yet with their escapade. They

had no need of arms, although they wore political badges. They were going to shout and make speeches and, if their luck held, they might force their way to the President's house. Then they would feel terrifically important.

Intoxicated by a novel sense of freedom, arms linked, sticks and flags waving, they poured into the square, and the first thing they saw was Sheelagh, golden and laughing, much more excited than they were themselves. She waved to them, of course, and equally naturally one of them tore off a red rosette and tossed it to her. Immediately, she pinned it on her breast, and with her scarf streaming over her head, she became at once the inspiration of the procession. Perhaps, hitherto, the young men hadn't quite known what they were going to do. Now they had a goddess to whom they must make sacrifice.

Amiably enough they pushed Richard to one side and, taking Sheelagh by both arms, they drew her with them in triumph. While they marched they sang, and as is always the case in Latin America, the combined rhythm of their feet and voices went to their heads.

In the tail of the procession, composed of citizens, anxious or mildly interested, Maria and I found ourselves walking, not because we were in sympathy with such purposeless display, but because, instinctively, we felt we must keep in touch with Sheelagh.

It is difficult to remember the exact sequence of events. We walked in thin shoes until our feet ached. Maria's face was grey. She hated the heat, the smells and the pressure of human bodies. Above all, she hated the feeling that her mother was making a spectacle of herself before a crowd of irresponsible youths who would never be allowed nearer their own women than the outside of an ornamental grille. But she trudged along with lips compressed and no expression at all. After a time, the crowd which had swelled until it comprised every lawless element in the town, led by students whose

original innocence was lost in a sense of unmerited and unbounded power, swayed back upon itself, halted by a patrol with fixed bayonets.

Maria and I, thrust into a doorway, could see little, but we heard a great deal of jeering and some threats. Then, to my amazement and the girl's despair, Sheelagh began to address the mob. I don't believe she had the faintest idea of the political point at issue, but she spoke of freedom and other large subjects and she did so with an enthusiasm which put new spirit into her immediate companions. By this time she had been raised to their shoulders, and no doubt she would have been borne as a living banner against the rifles of the military had not Richard intervened. How he succeeded in getting anywhere near the somewhat equivocal representatives of liberty I don't know, but he alone among the crowd was possessed of a single and sensible purpose and he achieved it. Before too much harm had been done, Sheelagh with hair magnificently disordered, flushed, dusty and delighted, was extricated from her admirers and forced into the nearest shelter, which happened to be a private house.

Deprived of their focusing point, the students began to waver. Fortunately, the officer in command of the patrol had sufficient sense not to force the issue. Soon the crowd had scattered and we were ignominiously escorted back to the hotel.

Sheelagh alone appeared to be entirely satisfied with the morning's occurrences. "It was fun," she repeated. "There must be great points about being a revolutionary, but it would be better perhaps to know what one was fighting for—".

"That's the difference between you and me," interposed Richard. "You would die quite happily for anything, any day. I'd only die after much thought for a specific cause."

"But one never has time to think," retorted Sheelagh,

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fanning herself with a hat she had collected from some stranger. Then she noticed her daughter. "Maria, you're dead tired—"

The girl looked up. "I am not tired. I am hurt and miserable and disgusted." She said it all very quietly and deliberately. Her mother looked as if she had been struck. "Don't you see," persisted Maria in a low, terribly concentrated voice, "those boys didn't mean anything and they might have been killed. It would've been your fault. It is always your fault." It was the only time in many years that I have seen Maria 'without her cloak.'

That afternoon Sheelagh was killed, and if anybody in Ecuador chooses to remember it, they will say—with truth, I suppose—that it was an accident. It was certainly nobody's fault but her own.

After an uncomfortable lunch during which Maria hung about her mother, offering her unusual condiments and her own head on a charger if she so desired, and Sheelagh, puzzled but unresentful, with the expression of a native in the pangs of first labour, addressed to her the major part of her more than usually brilliant heresies—after lunch, then, we went upstairs and but for the landlord would probably have gone to our rooms. But he effected the catastrophe he hoped to avert, for he warned us all that there might be a demonstration outside and that we must not make use of the balconies which looked on to the street. This was enough for Sheelagh. She spent the afternoon on the most exposed.

At first nothing happened except a number of speeches on which the populace seemed to become slowly intoxicated. The crowd was now so dense that no individual in it could move. Tempers began to rise. It was very hot. Probably none of the more or less involuntary agitators had had a proper meal that day. In the press, a good many people were knocked down. Some were hurt. A child was picked up

with blood pouring from its head. Its mother shrieked herself sick.

At this moment soldiers appeared at the end of the street. Farther away, we heard shots.

The crowd was far too closely packed to be able to retreat. Sullen, it held its ground and the usual ineffective missiles were thrown, but most of the men had knives and the situation began to look ugly. Still nothing might have happened, because the temper of South America changes as quickly as the climate. That evening, for instance, they were cheering the new President, and a few days later I heard that two hundred people were killed in a fight between factions of the same Liberal party.

Sheelagh, however, must have seen something that roused her to quick rage, for she leaned suddenly over the balcony and shouted that it was murder. We, pressing out of the window behind her, could see nothing, but we heard stones crashing against metal and masonry. The street resounded with confused noises, the screams of a woman predominating. Sheelagh, hatless, of course, with the sun full on her, seemed about to precipitate herself on to the serried heads below. Her full, deep voice gathered up all the passion of the crowd. She was already of it, irrevocably, because of her altruistic fury. Then something struck her on the forehead and she slipped heavily off the balcony. It was a parody of slow movement. Richard flung himself forward and nearly over the edge in a fruitless effort to hold her back. In another second he and I were on the stairs. I fell at the bottom of them and he went on, across the hall in a few strides, tearing open the door and then out into the glare and confusion of the street.

When he returned, considerably battered, he carried Sheelagh, heavy as she must have been, without effort. Her face bore no marks except a bruise on the forehead. Her expression was triumphant.

“Get a doctor,” ordered Richard.

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"It is no good," said the landlord, who looked as if the end of the world had come and found him wanting.

Across the ordinary hotel bed on which they laid Sheelagh, magnificently angry, I thought, in spite of her broken neck, Maria, white and dry, said to Richard : " You did love her, didn't you ? You weren't only in love with her ? "

I left them together, wondering how long they would hate each other.

And that is all I know of the three as they were in Ecuador.

I went back to the coast, but Maria would not come with me. Her England would now welcome her. I thought perhaps she would forget all that she had tried so hard to avoid knowing about her mother. She would remember only the splendour of comprehensive generosity, too instinctive for conventional valuations.

Richard wrote to me once or twice during the following years. I gathered that he had become reconciled to boots. Whenever I saw the name of his father's factory on bigger and bigger hoardings, I hoped success would bring him some form of satisfaction, but his letters might have been quoted as textbooks on unemployment, housing, the relation of wages to production and other such impersonal problems. Richard's purpose, I felt, was still in the crucible. Would he lose it altogether in a multitude of formulæ ? Without Sheelagh to forge his weapons and reveal to him the identity of the enemy, he might remain frustrated as much by his own deficiencies as by those of circumstance and other people.

Then I heard he had married. The biased individual who gave me the information as he got into a train added, " Not very suitable," and I imagined either the dourest revolutionary covered with badges and talking in borrowed shibboleths, or an expensive young woman for whom anybody so impetuous as Richard would be an easy road to a good time. I wondered what his father thought of it.

Then I went to Russia and wrote some articles which everyone criticized because they were neither blazing red, nor unblemished white. Richard read them and, in the first reasonable letter I had received from him, he confided that Sheelagh had told him to go to Russia—"She said that was the solution. She said I should find any number of reasonable objectives there and I could choose between them." Once again, I realized how much Sheelagh had had to give.

At the end of the letter Richard said that his father had finally agreed and that within a few weeks he was going to the Caucasus as an assistant engineer on some vast hydro-electric scheme. After this, he became technical and I was left both annoyed and surprised because he had never told me that he was an engineer. But I remembered his worship of machinery. He would be happy, I thought, making altars of concrete for the new gods. After all, a dynamo must be a satisfactory emblem of power. The old gods, gilt and faded, appealed to a sense of beauty that had no connection with Schopenhauer's 'hallmark of efficiency.'

When, for the second time, I went to Russia, I made a pilgrimage far beyond the reach of organized tourist travel in order to see what had become of Richard. It took me a long time to reach the tin and canvas township in Tadjikistan where several foreigners were working on the construction of a power station that now irrigates two hundred and fifty thousand acres of the best cotton soil in Central Asia. Nobody gave me permission to leave the beaten road, but nobody made any effort to stop me. So one evening, mellow with dust and a haze of insects, I arrived at Vaksh Stroi by means of a lift in a cotton truck, and saw the great river—the Oxus or the Amu Darya, according to whether your tastes are classical or modern—flowing deep and smooth on its way between the Chinese mountains and the Sea of Aral. I saw also a disconcerting confusion of mud-houses built on the age-

old Moslem principle, with a blind walled yard to defeat curiosity, shacks of corrugated iron and thatch, tents stretching irregularly over hillocks of sand. Behind me, but far distant, were the snow-capped peaks whose caves and gulleys had provided shelter for countless fugitives in wars for diverse forms of freedom.

I had had the forethought to provide myself with Richard's name and description, clearly written in Russian, so, by dint of showing this paper to anyone who looked as if he possessed a European intelligence, I reached, at last, a square box of a house, built quickly and carelessly of sun-dried bricks and already beginning to disintegrate into the generic mud of Asia by which it was surrounded.

Bowed beneath the bulk rather than the weight of my baggage, which consisted of a dispatch-case and a roll of bedding, I remained unaware of a figure coming to meet me until a familiar voice exclaimed : " Is it you ? What *are* you doing here, or am I dreaming you ? "

I dropped the bedding and, face to face with Maria, could find nothing better to do than to repeat : " It's you—what are you doing ? "

" I am with Richard, of course," she replied, laughing at me, and indeed I must have looked ludicrous with my mouth open and my hat on one side, my admirable English tweed, so unsuited to the heat, covered with dust and my shirt very obviously unwashed.

Even then, I didn't understand. " Is his wife here ? " I asked.

" She is. I am," retorted Maria with malice, and when I remained gaping at her, she said :

" Who else could he have married ? Didn't you know ? " And then, shaking my arm : " What's the matter ? Don't you approve ? "

Long ago Maria had perfected the defences of her manner,

but the blend of amusement and tolerance was more than I could bear. "Not at all," I replied. "Nothing could be more ridiculous."

It was rude, I knew, and it had the effect I expected. Maria ceased to smile. She said in a small voice that was yet cool, assured and synthetically indifferent: "Perhaps you are right, but you mustn't mind too much, for you will have to stay with us. There's nowhere else."

She picked up one end of the bedding and led me through a door that leaned askew into a room perhaps twelve foot square, with unplastered walls and on them the traces of much insect life. A desk made of raw wood and covered with ink-spotted baize stood under a window which, since it was open, looked as if it could never be shut. There were also a table and three chairs, two of them made of canvas.

"We've got an extra bed," explained Maria, "because Mr. Willis—he's the consulting engineer—sometimes sleeps here. We can put it up after supper. Richard's at the plant—I expect he'll be back in about an hour." She opened another door that looked as if it didn't know quite what it was doing. "This is where we sleep."

I saw two stretcher beds covered with coarse striped blankets, some clothes hanging on pegs, a number of English suitcases, a tin basin with a jug full of flowers standing in it, and three portraits of Sheelagh. Simultaneously, I remembered how Maria depended on her surroundings, how she had craved the security and comforts of England, to know exactly what was going to happen next, why it was going to happen, and at what time. Our eyes met. "I had to have Richard," she said.

We stood there, looking at the barren room, and Maria, leaning flat against the wall, with her arms outstretched and the palms of her hands pressed against the flaking mud, continued as if she were talking to herself. "I would have given any-

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thing to stay in England, but I couldn't. I had to come with Richard." With an abrupt change of voice, she asked if I would like some tea.

We drank it without milk in long glasses, and with the sugar we stirred into it a certain amount of alien matter so that it looked not unlike muddy water, but it was strong and refreshing.

"Tell me about Richard," I said. "What is his work out here?"

Maria sat on the least-comfortable camp-chair and launched into an effective technical description. From the few sentences I understood, I gathered some idea of the magnitude of the scheme which was not only to irrigate half the republic, but to bring civilization in the shape of light and power to villages consisting of mud huts and tents of black camel's or goat's hair. While she spoke I saw revolution in terms of progress and I realized the appeal such practical work would have for Richard. With the exception of Sheelagh, he had no use for the individual. His loyalty was to the people.

Thinking thus, I looked at Richard's wife and noticed an infinity of small changes. Her brown hair was less austere arranged. It broke into a deep wave above the brow and the skin of the broad, intelligent forehead showed very white against it. The dark eyes were smudged with shadow and the cheekbones seemed to me more clearly marked. Maria no longer kept guard on her impulses. The richness of her mouth was accentuated by the faintest possible lines that might have been dimples at the corners. Perhaps Sheelagh had been right after all. It only needed happiness to make beauty of that still, finely shaped face in which there was already a lovely restraint of curve and line. But Maria was not happy.

The shadows lengthened. "We won't have a lamp because there are so many insects." She smiled and said: "It's a case

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of 'seeing the light darkly.' Besides, I talk better in the dusk, don't you?"

"Who do you talk to here?" I asked, leaning far back in the best chair, smoking and wondering if I ought to clean my shoes or whether I should sacrifice the last of my principles and leave them to decay. It would be enough perhaps if I washed both my shirts.

"There's Mr. Willis," said Maria. "He is a great delight, completely expected and yet satisfactory." She twisted restlessly in her chair and it showed signs of collapsing. "Richard said he'd mend it, but he's overworked at the moment. There's been trouble at the plant. They put it down to sabotage, but that's the usual excuse." She hesitated. "Richard believes it. You know how he loves machinery. Something went wrong with a turbine, the main fuse blew, I think, and Richard went mad—yes, for the moment, I imagine he really was mad. I suppose there was the wrong kind of noise and some sort of explosion and for Richard it was his own flesh and bones in a mangle. He *feels* machines much more than people. And he's in love with what he imagines Russia is going to be. He sees all the chaos out here as the first days of Genesis, with a new world, a new civilization in the making. It's too big for me—and too uncomfortable. I can't get so excited on words. There are such a lot of words—sometimes I feel smothered in them—and they don't effect anything at all."

I remembered how Maria had loved the accepted facts of her class and race.

It grew darker. We could only see the outlines of the furniture. The girl in her narrow print frock had dwindled into a shape against the duskier pallor of the walls, but her voice acquired an added poignance. She said: "Richard has found what he wanted and it is killing him."

I asked no questions because in Ecuador I had decided that

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the man would have to be a martyr as the only alternative to failure. I thought perhaps he was fortunate to find a cause for which to die. So few are able to select suitable forms of martyrdom. But while I sat with her in the dusk, I was conscious of a growing affection for Maria. Hitherto she had always been in opposition—an ungracious attitude—to her mother's physical and spiritual exaggerations, to Richard's iconoclasm. Now, caught by her own affections which were simple and direct, she was at the mercy of all she did not understand. How could she have married Richard? Yet, how could she have resisted him if, for some utterly illogical reason, he decided that he needed her? It must have been his decision.

Maria's voice came out of the shadow: "You see, it wasn't me he married, it was Mother. He never wanted me, but I was the nearest he could get to her." The words came in a soft rush. (Whatever the qualities of Mr. Willis, Maria, I was sure, had never spoken like this to him.) "That's why I have failed him and he can *not* understand. I'm not in the least like Mother. There's nothing of her in me."

My heart was beating unusually fast. I could not think what was the matter. My breath came jerking out of my mouth and I was suddenly, without reason, afraid. The small stuffy room had lost its usual limitations. I could not see the walls, but the window continued interminably. It became the long, dim porch on which we used to spend so much time at Guayaquil. As clearly as if she had been within reach of my hand, I saw Sheelagh with the light of an invisible lamp on her face. I saw the heavy, splendidly disordered hair like a carved frame to her head and her skin which always seemed to have a life of its own. It was so rich and greedy. The lines did not matter. Her lips were parted as if she were in the middle of a sentence and her hands strong, well shaped, with fingers wide apart, were flung out palms upward in a characteristic gesture.

I saw the eager, indifferent eyes that became human only when their owner was above the usual fallacies of humanity. There she sat, leaning forward, as she had so often done, with greyish smears across her blouse and a glow of moisture on her throat. Even I had been fascinated by that throat and Richard dared only look at it when he thought himself unobserved.

From a distance, Maria's voice came to me. "He married a ghost." I did not hear the rest of the sentence, for the hallucination of Sheelagh's presence was so strong, but after some time, the girl's voice came nearer. "I tried to be like Mother and it was horrible, for I was nobody at all, not even myself. There were moments when Richard hated me. He was always coming to me for what I couldn't give. He used to forget and call me Sheelagh. Now, when he dreams, he still calls to her."

Slowly and with a succession of physical efforts, I forced myself back within more usual dimensions. The table in front of me assumed a vague shape. My heart was still beating in my throat, but I would not look at Sheelagh. I would not see her. She was dead.

Maria, determined to complete her own humiliation, continued in a toneless voice. "He thinks I've deceived him. That's why he hates me. Have you ever lived with hate, and hate that is ashamed of itself?" Then came a cry and with it the breaking down of all her defences. "Oh, Sita, what shall I do? You knew how I loved her. She was above everything. When she died there wasn't anything left, except Richard—no, not even Richard. That was long afterwards. Now I hate her."

Silence. "No," I said sharply, but it must have been five minutes later.

"Yes, yes," insisted Maria, who was crying gently on the other side of the room. "I do hate her because she won't die. She'll never die!"

Richard did not return till the middle of the night.

"He must have gone to the barracks—that's where the Russian engineers live. They have a sort of mess, and if there's any vodka going, they'll talk themselves into next century." So Maria explained and we lit the lamp and ate rather a nasty supper out of tins. Then we put up a camp-bed in the sitting-room and it fell down as soon as I got into it. Maria apologized and said we must have forgotten some essential part. I agreed, but as we couldn't find any more of it, we propped the two ends on chairs and, surprisingly, I slept.

During the next few days, I developed my acquaintance with Richard and made friends with Mr. Willis. At times, I felt I was reading two books at the same time, one by a futuristic mechanic, determined to be saved by a revelation, scientific instead of religious, the other by a cautious humanitarian who reduced everything to the terms of his own experience. Mr. Willis was immensely comforting, to me as well as to Maria. He could be relied upon to mend whatever Richard broke in the course of his tempestuous progress between objects he rarely observed, and to explain in the simplest possible terms the situation in Russia, or the needs of his assistant. Richard, he thought, was a fine lad who didn't get enough sleep, but he'd be all right when he'd finished the job with its complicated—and often dissident—responsibilities and got out of this country where nobody could keep their mouths shut. He considered Russia ineffective and muddled. The endless delays bothered him because he wanted to finish the job, but the mighty power station, the pylons tramping away across plain and hills were no more than material and power combined. To Richard, of course, they were symbols of civilization, and in his self-dedication, he made idols of them. While Mr. Willis said sensibly that Russia might have something to show in another generation and acknowledged that, if you were to forget slaughter on the scale of Attila, there was

a certain amount of improvement in living conditions, Richard spoke as one who saw a new heaven and a new earth. "The Bolshevik bug's got him all right," reflected Mr. Willis comfortably. "But don't you worry, Mary. It's not likely to be a permanent infliction and I tell you he has the makings of a damn' fine engineer." The Scot was too cautious to acknowledge that anyone had yet achieved success, but generous in prognosticating the future.

"If only he could get this silly idea of sabotage out of his head," said Maria. "He can't sleep, or eat, or think because of it. When he isn't at the Power House, he imagines a counter-revolutionary doing something appalling to all those lights and buttons." Maria smiled at her ally, but she was consumed with anxiety.

"I wouldn't say but he isn't right—up to a certain point, I mean," said Mr. Willis, with a judicial expression. "All these accidents aren't natural, but they're such an excitable lot up there, it's beyond me to say whether there's a few 'whites' among them, or whether they're all just darned careless."

That particular evening the consulting engineer and I went out to look at the storks' nests which hung shaggily over roofs and walls. I liked the great black and white birds standing on red legs and the Scot was amused by the metallic clamour produced by their beaks. "They talk as much as my Russian colleagues," he avowed, "and I understand as little," but I wanted to hear about Richard. "What's going to happen to him?" I asked.

"Depends on Mary."

"What can she do?"

"I don't say that she can do anything except go on loving him, but he'll need her some day."

"And then it'll be all right, you think!" I said, irritated beyond bearing.

"No, I wouldn't say that. I think the girl'll always have a

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hard time with Richard. He hurts himself so much, he's bound to hurt other people, too, but when he gets sufficiently smashed to need a sensible human woman who'll keep her mouth shut and not expect to be noticed every hour of the day, he'll forget all about that outlandish mother who's messed up their marriage so far."

Amazed by Mr. Willis's selection of wifely virtues, I remained silent until I remembered that neither Richard nor Maria could have spoken to him about Sheelagh. "How did you know about the mother?"

"One thing and another. A word or two they didn't notice. I'm no fool." A pause. Then: "And that young man's not half such a fool as you think either."

"What is he then?"

"A damned interfering philanthropist—we have enough of them in the kirk."

I laughed because the description would so have infuriated Richard. We were standing in an empty yard that must have belonged to a mosque. Deserted by the villagers, who had borrowed their faith and their social customs from a long-forgotten conqueror and lost them as easily, it contained some remnants of blue tiling at which a man in a Russian blouse was staring with a concentration they hardly merited.

"That's one of Richard's bugaboos!" said Mr. Willis with a genial smile. "Come here, Ivan, and be introduced." In a lower voice he confided: "He needs somebody to talk to."

So it was that I made friends with the half-Polish, half-Russian engineer, exiled in Tradjikistan. We used to go for long and purposeless walks together, late in the evening. After the first the man, whose name, of course, was not Ivan, whose real name, in fact, I doubt if any of us ever knew, confided to me some of his doubts.

Large, dark and sombre, he would shuffle along beside me

with an ungainly but untiring stride, talking of the Russia he loved and it was not the Russia of to-day. He was puzzled, but in spite of all the sorrows he had seen—and I imagined endured—he showed no bitterness. Sometimes, I felt he was flotsam on the muddy river of progress. But he had once been a soldier and was still conscious of duties, without being able to define them. With Slavonic deliberation he debated with me the future of the new, crude Russia, vital, certainly full of strong stubborn growths, terribly articulate, but incoherent and disordered. “We might have done as much if they’d given us time,” he said, and I knew that by ‘time’ he meant eternity.

“Why are you here?” I asked one day.

“One must eat,” he said with the slow smile that relaxed and brought into a gentler relationship the rugged features strewn about his face. It sounded a sensible reason, but Ivan was not at all sensible. For instance, he sincerely regretted that he had not been killed with innumerable friends, yet, if he had ever had any property, he did not regret its loss. “As a people, we are not in the least possessive,” he explained. “We could never hoard. We couldn’t even keep. We have the art of losing everything, even a woman or a country, but we cling furiously to our own souls. You’ve noticed how important our souls are? We take them out and examine them. We weep over them and it embarrasses you Saxons. How carefully you ignore your souls—they are bad form, aren’t they?”

We were talking French and Ivan threw back his broad head with its mat of smooth black hair and laughed full-throated, but on another occasion he said, with his face crumpled up like a small child’s: “I don’t know what I must do for my soul. I am afraid.”

It was Ivan I minded leaving. Maria and Richard, desperately aware of each other, torn by opposite extremes of

the same emotion, might find a solution in each other's arms. If ever they could express their hate or their love, I imagined they would find in the similarity of their sensations a basis for understanding. If, without words, they ever became aware of a common need, or found themselves in momentarily significant agreement, they might begin to appreciate the value of their marriage. Sheelagh would be forgotten so soon as either or both of them ceased to dramatize their situation. But Ivan, with centuries of oppression in his veins, would as likely as not make an ineffectual sacrifice of himself for a cause in which he had no longer any great belief. For the familiar Russia was beyond his help and he knew that a wholly different Russia, dependent neither on the past nor the present, might quite possibly develop in the future. He had no certainties left, but he had life and I wanted him to keep it.

With my passport shamelessly out of order, I slunk across a frontier, where nobody bothered about formalities, and in due course I returned to the England of the squirage, so reassuring to Maria. For a while I tried to see in it the fundamental values that appealed to her, but they seemed to me shaken. Like Richard, I felt that the old weapons were outworn. New ones must be forged and the anvils were not yet ready.

When, months later, I met Mr. Willis, grey, trim and solid, unobtrusively in keeping with the London street, I didn't wait for conversation to develop on the heels of conventional greetings. I said: "Hello! How are they all? Ivan, I mean, and the Richardsons." But the Scot would not be hurried. He put his umbrella squarely in front of him and looked down at it. His lips twisted as he reflected upon the answer he would make. "There was a bit of trouble at the plant," he said at last. "The big dynamo had arrived and Richard sang a Hallelujah over it when he got it into place. The big bugs were coming down for the opening, and it would have been a fine show, no doubt, but for the accident as I was saying."

Mr. Willis seemed intent on forcing the point of his umbrella through the pavement. "Maybe it was a mistake, but Richard thought Ivan had deliberately interfered with the timing. They were alone at the switch-board when the explosion occurred and the lad saw three years' work going up in smoke and it was too much for him." Mr. Willis screwed up his lips still tighter. "I cannot say that I altogether blame him."

"What happened?" I asked, feeling sick, for if Richard fought it would be for an ideal that lived, but Ivan, caring not at all if he died but determined that Richard should not die, would be fighting without conviction for something that no longer existed.

"There was a bit of a scrap. I wouldn't deny it. Ivan fell over something and got a knock on the head."

I remembered the hall with its levers and gauges. Along the whole of one side was a switchboard blinking red and white lights. The floor was paved with the local stone. On it a man's head could be split like an egg-shell.

"Um, yes, it was a bad business," said Mr. Willis with a sigh. He looked up quickly. "Instantaneous. Not such a hard way out. Richard wanted to give himself up for murder, but they wouldn't have it. They said it was an accident."

For a moment we remained motionless in the middle of the crowded pavement. Then somebody bumped against me and I moved away. Mr. Willis followed me. "Mary's all right. She's expecting a baby." He waited for me to say something, but I was thinking of Ivan. So, after a few steps, he left with a gentle "Good day."

Maria came back to England so that her son—of course it would be a son—should be born in the West Country. She was very happy. Richard, for the moment, was hers. She had not the faintest idea what he would want to do next, where

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he would go, or what would happen to them, but such superficial considerations had ceased to trouble her. I have never seen a woman so utterly content.

It was from Richard when he rushed over to England for three days, because it suddenly occurred to him that a son might be nearly as interesting as a turbine, that I heard how it had all happened.

"I'd been keeping an eye on that fellow, Ivan," he said, "though there were moments when I couldn't help liking him. But when I threw over the switch that should have brought in the big dynamo, number four she was, and there was the telephone ringing like mad and Willis shouting up, 'Not three, you fool,' I knew exactly what had happened. Nobody but Ivan could've got at the wiring. It was too late to stop the smash. Willis got the benefit of that down in the engine-room, but I went for the first thing I could get hold of and that was Ivan's throat. I meant to kill him." Richard's language flared. A 'white' to him, or anybody else determined to go 'backwards, blindfolded,' was automatically a traitor and better out of the way. While I listened, I found my hands gripping the arms of my chair. We were seated in mid-morning in the lounge of an unattractive hotel. Deservedly it was empty. Richard had had breakfast at seven. I was supposed to be drinking the coffee he had ordered for me.

I stared at the cup and saw it as illogically large and important while Richard said: "I would have killed him if he'd put up a fight, but he didn't. We went down with a crash, and while I was trying to bust his head against the corner of that main box, you know, I knew he'd done what he had to and didn't care about the rest. But I'd every intention of taking it out of somebody, so I dragged him up and told him he was for it unless he put up a show. And I tell you, Sita, his face was so queer I thought he was laughing. Perhaps he was laughing. After that, I don't know what happened. I don't

know even that I wanted to kill him. I'd gone cold. But we slipped about on that infernal floor, and just as I thought it wasn't worth while, he went down a fearful whack, and the next thing I knew was his brains all over the place."

Richard came to a full stop. To save my life, I couldn't have avoided asking "Were you satisfied?"

"The hell, I was!" said Richard, and his tone left no doubt as to his meaning. We sat in silence. Then Richard said: "I was sick like a dog." Another silence. "When I got out of that place, I went straight to Maria. I thought she ought to have a chance of clearing out. But she wouldn't go. Not even when I told her what I'd done." The man's voice was full of amazement. "Would you have thought that girl—you remember how she was always afraid—would have stuck to a murderer?"

"Yes," said I sharply. "That's exactly what she would do."

Richard regarded me with a frown. After a while, he said: "Well you're right, and what's more, she wasn't going to have me doing a bolt either. She said we'd got to face things." We looked at each other and I wondered how far his comprehension had gone. Sheelagh would never have 'faced things.' She would have swept them aside, evaded them in her magnificently casual way. "It was odd," said Richard, "suddenly to realize that one had never met one's own wife."

The Man who made Fear

PERSIA AND THE RED SEA

PERSIA is an enchanting country, but it contains a great deal of salt desert with which it is unwise to become too familiar. On a certain morning, not as early as I should have liked, for it was, I think, the end of May and therefore hot, I set out from the lovely and forlorn city of Shiraz on a three-quarter ton lorry with a doubtful back axle to cross a small portion of the 'terrible emptiness' which is the desert way to Yezd.

I cannot think why I ever imagined that lorry would be able to stand up to such a journey. I must have been ludicrously optimistic, for the wretched vehicle was very much overloaded with cases of tea. Its tyres were not unlike Gruyère cheese and its radiator began to leak before we had gone three miles along the perfectly good road leading to the ruins of Cyrus the Great's capital. Among the remains of his banqueting hall, I sat, looking at the majesty of porticoes and colonnades with the stark hills showing through them while several Persians and the Armenian driver lay under the lorry. And this sort of thing was repeated daily, although there were no more fallen palaces and temples to relieve the monotony. How long it took us to reach the blistering waste of salt that lies between two ranges, I do not know, but in the late afternoon we started to cross it. By nightfall, explained the driver, we should arrive at an agreeable village where we could eat,

drink green tea, smell roses, listen to nightingales, running water and the music of lutes because the principal merchant of the place was about to be married. It all sounded delicious and improbable.

Long before nightfall, of course, we had sunk through the crust of glittering white salt and were firmly wedged in the sands of the desert. I must say both the driver and my fellow-passenger were exceedingly patient. They unloaded the lorry and, when every bale and box was strewn around us, they tried to jack up one wheel, but the instrument immediately sank out of sight. At my suggestion, we then began to dig. By sunset we had made a magnificent hole. In this we placed the largest case of tea which made a solid basis for the jack. We had previously removed the wheel, so now we were able slowly and anxiously to raise the axle. In time it was free of sand and we could replace the wheel, run the lorry off the case of tea, and remove the latter from its unusual position.

In starlight we reloaded. All the water had run out of the radiator, so, much against my wishes, we poured into it most of the contents of our drinking-bottles. "It does not matter," said the driver with a flourish of long, thin arms: "It is cool. We shall not feel thirst and before the moon sets we shall have arrived."

Doubtfully, I climbed up beside him. In front of us, bounded only by despairingly distant hills, lay mile after mile of what looked like hoar-frost. Faintly silvered and broken into deep waves, salt and sand rolled interminably away. There seemed to me no reason why it should prove more solid than the similar desert in which we had sunk to the mudguards.

We started. The driver said: "See, it is quite hard—a good surface. We shall soon be there," and after another fifty yards we heeled right over, with one wheel in the air

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and the other settling rapidly into the middle of the ~~ear~~. This time it took us a great deal longer to dig out the lorry, but we followed the same process and the Persians accepted it all as the will of Allah. "It is written," they said, and bent their backs under sharp-cornered cases of tea or used their hands as spades and their shoulders as complementary levers. In the dawn the lorry stood comparatively straight upon the desert and the Armenian suggested reloading.

"If you do that we shall spend the rest of our lives—and they won't be long—digging up this sea of salt," I protested, for obviously our only chance of crossing the treacherous waste was without any load at all. I offered to pay for the tea, or for a caravan to come back and fetch it. I pointed out that in an hour or two we should be in a furnace, with hardly a cupful of water apiece and none at all for the radiator. The passengers had brought no food and although I would, of course, share my few provisions, they would not feed half a dozen people for more than a day.

The Armenian, however, remained obdurate. He would not proceed without his cargo. So we all strained our backs under those horrible boxes of tea, but I refused to sacrifice the rest of my water to the radiator.

When all was ready, the Persians pushed and heaved, but they were getting tired, so our start was not a great success. For a few yards we blundered through deepening troughs of sand. Then we sank again. This time nobody attempted to do anything. It was too hot.

The Persians lay down in the shade cast by the leaning lorry. I put up my camp-bed and tried to sleep with a blanket over my head, but as the sun rose, it burned right into us. It dried our bodies and blistered our mouths. We put everything we had on top of us and the heat came through till the pores of our skins seemed to crack. The Armenian said: "It is only one day—to-night we will dig out the

lorry and go on." The Persians said: "If it is the will of Allah, we die, but we must not drink till it is night." On the whole, the second remark was the most sensible, for when the sun set and we had eaten biscuits and chocolate and drunk measured mouthfuls of warm, brackish water, we found we had not enough strength to be really effective. We dragged the cases to the edge of the lorry and let them fall on to the sand, heedless if they broke, and we bumped ourselves a good deal in the process. Then we tried to shovel under the two wheels that had disappeared altogether, working in turn because our backs and heads and eyes all ached, but we made little progress. Towards morning, it was obvious that we could not right the lorry. So with the fatalism inevitably engendered by the desert, we ate what remained of my provisions, sucked the last drops of liquid out of the tins and lay down again.

Hour after hour, the sun beat upon us. We could feel it, heavy on our heads and shoulders, although we had torn off the sacking which covered the tea-boxes and contrived a frail shelter on the leaning side of the lorry. By the afternoon I felt as if I had been beaten flat into the earth. I lost all sensation of heat and began to dream of huge hailstones breaking down anything which tried to stand upright. Long afterwards, it seemed to me, I heard someone shouting. With difficulty I dragged myself from the ground where there had been more shade than on the camp-bed. The sun was setting and the sands were stained with red and amber. Surprised to find it still the same day, I looked across the highly coloured desert and saw a motor-car. I could not believe it existed, so I wondered why the Armenian, looking like Lazarus bereft of his winding-sheet, continued to make such a noise. But the Persians also were struggling to their feet. Waving their arms and portions of their clothing, they gave premature thanks to Allah for, when the

car proved itself real by stopping beside us, while the driver asked—unnecessarily—what was the matter, it became obvious that it could not carry eight extra passengers. On the back seat were three dignified personages, two of whom wore the turbans forbidden in favour of the Pahlevi hat, and the other an Arab cloak over one of those doubtful local suits of lilac origin. Beside the driver sat a thin, grey-haired man with an air of authority. He was burned darker than any of the others, but I took him for a European and to him I appealed when his companions seemed inclined to leave us in the desert, with a little water and vague promises of help on the morrow. The grey man answered in French and as a result of his interposition, I was crushed into the front seat with the gears between my knees and the oldest Persian, who looked much too delicate for the journey he had undertaken, was accommodated at the feet of the personages behind.

Effortlessly, we then sped across the sands, hearing always the soft crunch of the salt under our wheels, watching the smoky browns and golds diminish, until the moon rose and the desert shone with the chill putrescence of death. The earth looked as if, long ago, it had decayed and, to add to the illusion, we passed a few skeletons of camels, their bones silvered with synthetic frost.

It seemed to me natural that we should speak very little. The driver asked nothing at all and he never changed his pace. At full speed, he drove across the surface, bumping over the crests of sand waves, plunging with a screech of gears through the soft hollows where he feared to sink. Only when, in starlight, we reached hard ground under the lee of the hills, did he relax against the back of the seat. His foot lifted from the accelerator and the force of our passage was spent.

At the first village, where only the dogs were awake, we

roused men who said they owned camels, gave them money and made them swear by the Prophet—an illegal oath—that before dawn they would set out to rescue the lorry. I wanted to wait in order to see the caravan start, but the Frenchman would not permit it. In other circumstances I might have argued, but I had eaten nothing for sixteen hours and the grey man, with a face of leather and the hardest eyes I have ever seen, possessed some quality of resistance which made it useless to oppose him. He said little, but in him there were walls and walls against which no assault could prevail. He did not need to speak. He had only to exist and within the considerable radius of his influence, people felt helpless.

The car started again, but the driver seemed to be uncertain of the way. We blundered off the track into plough indistinguishable from the surrounding mud. We leaped a few ditches and were brought up short by earthen walls. Some of them we broke down and the car, bucking like a young steer, went straight across country, so that I was flung first against the driver and then upon the chest of the man who held himself rigid on the other side. He made no comment and I withdrew myself, more battered by the opposition I felt in him than by the blows dealt us in turn by every portion of the car with which we could possibly come in contact.

After midnight we reached a village, with which the Frenchman appeared to be familiar and, by peculiar ways, we came to a house whose walls stood up into the sky. There were no windows. The driver and the Frenchman talked in whispers. Muttered converse went on round the door before it opened and a large man, in a robe-like night-shirt and a skull-cap, with an old-fashioned pistol in his hand, gave us grudging permission to enter.

The Frenchman then said to me: "It is, as you have

guessed, a bad house, but we must have some rest. There is a room upstairs. You can either sleep there with these merchants, who are decent men, or, if you prefer, you can put up my bed in an empty stall. I have business to do, so I shall not need anything except a cup of coffee."

At that moment the driver, another Armenian, became unexpectedly amiable. He said : " She cannot sleep with these men, respectable though they are. I will look after her, for are we not all Europeans ? " He took me across a yard in which donkeys and camels slept and showed me a stall with a door which I could fasten by means of a heavy wooden bar. Subsequently, he brought me green tea, water for washing and the Frenchman's camp-bed. When I confided to him that I ached with hunger, he produced sheets of bread, thin as brown paper, and an unpleasant mess of meal, strongly flavoured with red pepper. " Sleep well," he said, at last. " At eight o'clock I will call you, but do not open the door before then, for it is an evil house."

Perturbed and exhausted, I subsided upon the camp-bed, but after half an hour, during which it was obvious that a number of people watched me through an earthen grille at the back of the stall, while others surreptitiously tried the door, I got up again and sought for the fork with which I had eaten my supper. It was the only available weapon, so I put it under my pillow. Then I slept.

While it was still dark, although fires had been lit in the yard and a faint reflection of them crept through the interstices in my walls, a voice woke me. Stupefied with sleep, I could not understand what it said, but somebody pushed so violently at the door that the bar shook. Gripping the fork, which would certainly crumple if it met with any resistance, I prepared for defence. But the door withstood the strain. The owner of the voice went round to the back and began a determined assault upon the lattice. Several

other pairs of hands lent themselves to the work and the mud showed signs of crumbling.

Awake now, I shrieked for the driver and, within a few feet of me, his voice replied : " Why would you not answer when I beat upon the door ? Here have I been trying to wake you for the last hour and I thought you were dead, with your throat cut by the evil people in this house and here am I now trying to break down the wall to save you." That salvation would have come too late, had the circumstances been as he described, occurred to neither of us, because I could do nothing but repeat furiously : " It's nowhere near eight o'clock ! You said eight and it's still the middle of the night."

Then I heard the Frenchman's voice in the yard : " Madame ! He meant eight o'clock Persian time and that begins an hour after sunset."

Unduly humiliated, for nobody could have seen the fork with which I had been prepared to attack the most vulnerable portions of whatever body first forced its way through door or lattice, I apologized for the delay and by half-past four, European time, we were all packed into the car and on our way to Yezd.

Before we reached that strange earthen city with its host of wind-towers which catch every breeze for the benefit of the rooms below and look like tall corn-stalks yellow in the summer haze, I had learned the Frenchman's name, or one of his names, for the Persians called him ' Brother of many secrets.'

Jean de Broglie, he styled himself, but I never knew if he had any right to so distinguished an appellative. He lived, inasmuch as he ever lived anywhere, between the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea, but he was often to be found at Djibouti, where he had, at times, kept a store and run an estaminet with, I suspected, a gambling place attached. For

Jean 'de Broglie' acknowledged himself an adventurer. In the early morning light which bathed us in freshness, wiping out the memories of heat and hunger and exhaustion, he talked with considerable knowledge of the sea and of the desert which apparently divided his allegiance. Unsmiling and without much expression, he told me of the dhows he had owned and wrecked, or lost in the course of his illicit trading. For he had dealt in charras, the fierce Asian drug that Egypt and Constantinople buy. He had run cargoes under the eyes of British sloops which could not get into the reef. He had made money selling rifles in Abyssinia and had lost it pearl-fishing off the coast of Western Arabia. There was nothing he had not tried and he hated the English because, above all other nations, they stood, blindly and without imagination, for the law which he defied.

When Yezd showed like a ripe cornfield above the dustier gold of the desert, he told me where to find him in Djibouti, but, apart from the fact that he was going to the hills of Persian Baluchistan, I could discover nothing about his present business. To every suggestion of interest, he opposed the blank wall of his resistance. It was both terrifying and exhausting to be in contact with anything so unyielding. I cannot define the relentless effect of the man, but the crumpled Armenian driver felt it also and the Persian merchants, accustomed to the delicate treachery of words. They did not understand the direct brutality of the Frenchman and his power of silence, for when he spoke of his ships and the sea, it was as if they had nothing to do with him. Even when he recounted his own adventures in a low voice utterly devoid of expression, it seemed that he spoke of a stranger. And a stranger, I think, he remained to himself and to everybody else, for nobody knew why he risked his life, trading dope, pearls and arms, sailing dhows without papers or ballast, to shores guarded by uncharted reefs. He

did not want money. When he had it, he did not know how to spend it. But he was hard and he had to set himself against something even harder, the sea and the desert and the laws he despised.

In Yezd, I stayed with a delightful and highly intelligent Indian merchant, a Moslem, who spoke several languages. In his garden, discreetly walled, and full of white and copper roses, we talked about the Frenchman who travelled for no obvious purpose into the Baluchi mountains. From there I knew slaves were still brought by night, in long marches, to some desolate place on the Persian Gulf. Dhows slipped out on a moonless night and in the markets of Koweit and Oman, farther still, in Nejd and Hadramaut, the services of Baluchi hillmen could be obtained after much bargaining and the secret payment of gold. I wondered if the Frenchman was interested in this nefarious trade, forbidden by the Persian Government and rendered doubly difficult by the activities of British sloops in the Gulf. To this suggestion, the Indian replied : "There are clever brains and cruel ones behind that trade."

The Persians are not cruel. They are subtle, mystical and forlorn, waifs of a great civilization, lost in the maze of their own intellects. But Jean, I felt, might be as cruel as was necessary or convenient, and for a passing moment I wondered what it would be like to be married to him. Then I laughed at the idea, for the man was utterly self-centred. Every thought and feeling strengthened the essential quality in him which would always be in opposition. He could never give a particle of himself to anybody else. His strength was inviolate because it had no concern with other people. I wondered what had turned his hair grey. He might be forty, but his body suggested steel and hide.

The next time I went to Djibouti, on my way to Harrar where I proposed to collect a mule caravan for an eleven

hundred mile journey through the length of Abyssinia, I made a point of finding Jean de Broglie. It was not difficult. He lived in a small, white house, unexpectedly neat, beyond the outskirts of the town. The hotel-keeper directed me and he told me a few more stories of the Frenchman's prowess at sea. There was not a boat or a native that he could not handle.

I drove some way in a toy carriage which threatened to fall to pieces. Then I walked across long, tussocky grass and sand. It was clean country, windswept and close to the sea. Where an inlet ran deeply into the sand and the water made soft stirring noises, I found the house and in it a woman who should certainly never have left her village in the peaceful hills of Provence.

I was so amazed to find Jean had a wife that at first I did not notice what had happened to her. We sat on two straight chairs with our feet among straggling plants which refused to grow because of the salt earth and the sun and the wind, both of which were excessive, and we talked, or rather I talked, of my meeting with de Broglie. The woman beside me was as neat as her house and nearly as colourless. To this day I cannot remember whether her eyes were brown or blue, whether she had fair hair or grey, which is odd because from the first I was willing to help her commit anything except murder and after my second visit I realized that murder was the only possible solution.

For the woman was terrified. That I do remember. She was in a state of such stupefied and irrational fear that when, knowing her not at all, I stopped talking about Persia and asked : "What has he done to you?" she looked at me with large, blank eyes and said : "Nothing. It is just that. He does nothing, but he will not let me go."

Oddly enough, I knew what she meant, for the man's presence was sufficiently oppressive. He represented the

negation of every normal desire, yet he showed no signs of hostility or vindictiveness. He simply was not there so far as ordinary relationships were concerned and, to my dismay, I found myself startled when he came out of the house and decidedly breathless when he spoke to me. Yet he was polite to us both in the way that a mechanical figure might be. While we talked of a dhow he was building with the help of Arab carpenters, I saw his wife's nerves strained to breaking-point and there was no reason for it. I asked her if she liked the sea and with too much feeling she replied : "I hate it. I abhor it. I hate this country and I am afraid of it. Whenever I see a native, I think he is going to put a knife into my back." She paused. "I have been here for fifteen years," she said, with such intensity of bitterness that I looked for some equally forceful reaction on the part of her husband, but he did not notice his wife's emotion. He said something about the difficulty of procuring seasoned wood for his boat and I asked the woman : "Have you not been back at all ?"

"Never," she said.

Jean walked with me across the rough grass which swung with the wind, so that I felt we were pushing our way against a tide. "You should let her go home," I said, greatly daring, for I knew exactly what his wife felt. Whenever I was with Jean, I had the impression of being under a wall. At any moment it might fall. I think it was because the man understood nothing about ordinary human purposes. He could not have told why he did things, or what he hoped to gain by them. Some deep, physical urge drove him to the sea and to the desert, drove him into danger and up against the law which he smashed because he could not otherwise direct the vast, unyielding force within himself. I think Jean de Broglie is the only man of whom I have been afraid, with that sick, dark, inner fear that has no reason

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at all. Yet I never saw him other than controlled and quiet.

"She can go if she likes," he said, with obvious resentment, "but why should she? Her people are dead. I have no place in France."

In spite of the cold weight of opposition which I felt so that I imagined stone or metal walking beside me, I persisted: "She looks ill—she ought to have a change." But I did not dare to say: "She will go mad if she stays here another fifteen years."

The man retorted: "There is nothing to stop her going." But I knew that the woman with the foolish name of Nanette had long ago lost the power of coherent effort. She might force herself to pack and to buy a ticket, but after that her heart would begin hammering. She would press her hand—an attractive hand, but too thin—against her chest and sit down. She would go on sitting till something extraneous happened to her, till an entirely illogical fear drove her to cook the dinner or to give orders to the capable Somali boys whom she disliked. And next day, she would not remember why she had packed. She would be a jelly-fish again with just about as much power of resistance.

It was as a jelly-fish I occasionally thought of her during the months I spent in Abyssinia—a pale, well-shaped, rather pretty creature, transparent and quivering, always flat and lying wherever the tide in the form of Jean had left her.

At times, of course, I told myself not to be ridiculous. No man could have such an effect on a woman without doing anything at all. And I knew that Jean did nothing. He had no need to.

The following year I returned to Djibouti, again on my way to Abyssinia where I proposed to get in touch with the slave traders, if possible to travel the secret road from West to East with one of their caravans so that I might learn the

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extent of the commerce which supplied apparently willing domestic service to the harems of Yemen and Hedjaz.

This time I stayed with Nanette, for her husband was at sea with a cargo of contraband and a crew of eleven rascally Arabs, most of them culled from prison. The woman was just as much like a jelly-fish as I remembered her, but deep inside her, like the faint colour at the centre of the queer crystalline creatures one sees lying on the beach, I observed purpose growing. She had been bruised beyond the pitch of acquiescence. In her foolish and unnecessary helplessness stirred a spark of rebellion, but it was smothered by the habits and the fears of half a lifetime.

I said to her : " Why don't you go now ? If you haven't any money, I'll lend you some."

Nanette looked at me with more amazement than terror and said : " How could I go ? In a few weeks, he will come back."

" What does that matter ? " I retorted, bewildered in my turn, for I had been so sure of purpose in the hitherto supinely acceptant creature.

Nanette always sat with her back to the sea, with the curtains drawn if possible and in the small pink and white room, innocent of bows and bead fringes, she sought to barricade herself with familiar possessions against wind and storm, the sun, the sweeping open country and her husband. They were all too big for her.

" What are you going to do ? " I said at last, and she replied, twisting her fine, thin hands : " I don't know."

More gently, I asked : " Why did you marry him ? "

" How could I help it ? Look what he is. Would he not always get what he wanted ? "

Why Jean should ever have wanted this particular woman I could not conceive, but I agreed with her last remark, so

I said: "Can you tell me why exactly you *are* so much afraid of him?" and I spoke in the most reasonable tones, wishing it was not quite so stuffy with the door shut and insects clustering thick upon the ceiling. Then Nanette surprised me, for she said: "No, I can't. But you—you are also afraid and I ask you why?"

My reply was at least vigorous. I said: "But I do know. Of course, I know. It is because not for one instant does Jean allow any bridge between himself and anyone else. He is as remote as an iceberg and as unconsciously destructive. He has no use for even the most momentary personal relationship. He has never had a regret in his life. I am sure if he gave that old Somali fisherman, who sails with him so often and who worships him as some sort of sea god, strychnine in mistake for the gin which is nearly as bad for him—and that is rotten of Jean, anyway—he would not care at all. He would just get another Somali and that man too would worship him." I thought to myself, perhaps there would be safety in worshipping him. From the beginning, Nanette had probably been too frightened and too full of dislike, to try forgetting herself altogether like the sailors who were Jean's shadows.

The third and last time that I went to Djibouti, I found Nanette wandering about on the verge of distraction. She said little except: "I can't bear it," and when Jean was present she said nothing at all.

I thought the man looked ill. He had a slight temperature, but there are so many different kinds of fever in the low lands by the Red Sea that I did not expect him to be able to diagnose his particular variety. The last journey had been a success and he talked a good deal about the twenty-ton sambukh he had sailed on the Azzieb—the southerly gale that tears down from Aden bearing with it great seas—and how he had nearly piled her on the reefs

near Massawa, but chance had saved him. Chance, I thought, would always save Jean de Broglie. But I was wrong.

In spite of his fever, the man insisted on sitting outside till dusk fell heavily over the waste in which he had built his house. He sat in a long canvas chair with his legs stretched out and fever put a flame into his eyes and into his lean, dark face. He looked as if he might burn out like one of those long candles deeply red or brown that one sees in churches, and it would be a pity, I thought, for with him would go something vital and primeval.

A Somali with a white sheet wound about him came and stood beside us. He was golden-brown, lusty and hard, a creature of the sun and the sea, but he had not half the life of the man in the chair. Jean's magnificent, strong bones showed through flesh and clothing and the hot blood in his cheeks accentuated his air of living to the last reckless instant. His grey hair, with dark threads in it, swept back from a broad forehead. It was thick and fierce like his nostrils and the curve of his lips. Like a hawk he poised in the chair and as usual I felt that he was only there for a moment, that he must inevitably spring up, swift and certain, stand with every muscle keyed and then move away with long, even strides. While I watched him talking to the Somali, I realized that it was Jean I liked. I was so sorry for his wife that I would, at any moment, have done anything to help her, but her futility disturbed me. Nobody had any right to be so inefficient in the business of living. Jean was just the reverse. He took hold of life and rode it as he chose. I admired him nearly as much as I feared him.

While the Somali stood upright, his spine as straight as the spear he carried, Nanette came out of the house. She looked furtive and her eyes were bloodshot. I knew she had not slept for several nights, so I suggested we should walk over the sea-plain and perhaps somebody would give

us a lift to the town. I thought if we sat in the café which had checked tablecloths and tight bunches of flowers pushed into earthenware jugs, she might imagine herself for a moment in France, especially if the gramophone was playing and the Patron's large wife talking of prices in Marseilles. Nanette looked at me with an odd expression, trotted back into the house and came out again with a neat, blue bag. "We will buy quinine," she said: "and something to make me sleep."

Jean called that he did not want any of our *sacré* *médecines* and we set off across the grass which rushed about our feet, wind-driven, like the little, useless waves in the creek. Nanette walked very slowly and she would not talk to me. When we reached the sandy road, a lorry driver invited us to share the front seat with him and we bumped along, Nanette silent, the blue-bloused mechanic and I exchanging cheerful nonsense. When we came to the first street the Frenchwoman insisted on getting out. Under the few lights we walked, still slowly, but as we passed a store which sold saddlery, rolls of cotton and silk, chemicals and tinned food all agreeably confused, Nanette turned with surprising agility and bolted through the door. When I rejoined her, she was leaning on the counter, talking earnestly to a pleasant young man who had often sold me pills and blankets on my way to the interior. "I want it at once," said Nanette, clinging to the edge of the counter, and her voice rose.

The youth who looked as if he were familiar with soap and razor, studied his customer with shrewd blue eyes. Unaffected by the climate, cool and composed in spite of the heat, he spoke the French of Normandy and looked like one of the pippin-faced lads one sees in the unfenced stretches of plough bordered by poplars between Calais and Rheims. "*Ma foi*, it is very strong!" he said, regarding the prescription which Nanette had handed to him.

"I want it strong," said the woman. "If I cannot sleep to-night, it will be the end."

Doubtfully the fair youth said: "*Eh bien*, Madame, you must make no mistake with the doses." Then he looked at me and his eyes were sensible and honest. "*Voyons donc*, Madame de Broglie, let me give you something else. You will sleep just as well." To me, in a different voice, he said: "This is a hell of a place for nerves. It is the drought or the damp—one does not know which. Most of the women are taking bromide. That is what you need, Madame de Broglie."

An argument followed. Nanette would have nothing but the preparation which she said made her sleep 'for a real European night, not just the gap between the jackals howling at midnight and the sea birds crying in the dawn.'

The chemist, correct and unimaginative in his white suit, with his hair smelling of pomade and his nails neatly squared, looked as if he were going to refuse. "Where did you get the prescription?" he asked. "It could even be dangerous."

Nanette's face closed like a small, well-shaped box. It became secretive and guarded. I had never seen her look like that. "A ship's doctor gave it to me. I paid him—I paid him a lot." She still gripped the wood of the counter and instinctively I came nearer to her. If the young man refused to make up her prescription, I had an idea that she would break into small pieces. Djibouti certainly affected the nerves. Laughing, I made some commonplace remark and Nanette seemed to be grateful. She contrived to smile at the young man and he changed his mind.

"*C'est bien*," he said, and went into a shed behind the shop. When he returned he carried a green, ribbed bottle with a red label. "It is poison," he said, "and I shall not be responsible if you take too much." His eyes met mine:

"Madame de Broglie will sleep all right and you, Mademoiselle, will have to prepare breakfast."

Flattered by the 'Mademoiselle,' I murmured a few polite remarks and then I remembered the quinine. "It is for Captain Jean," I explained. "He has fever."

The young man showed interest and concern, for de Broglie was a legend on both sides of the Red Sea. The English publicly denounced him and privately appreciated his exploits. The French admired, adored, were irritated by and despaired of the pirate whom they often found useful and always exciting. He provided them with conversation and a grievance against their hide-bound allies. "Are you sure it is not this new infection?" asked the chemist. "They say it comes from India. The temperature mounts suddenly. *Enfin*, it is a plague!"

I could not describe Jean's symptoms, but I bought a bottle of the brilliant red fluid recommended by the young man although I knew my host would throw it out of the window. Then I rejoined Nanette. We went to the local café, where I chose a table with an orange and white cloth. We drank highly coloured syrup and my companion talked in a childish and irresponsible fashion—of Provence, of a dress she had worn about eighteen years ago, of a pond where blue and purple flowers whose names she had forgotten grew in spring. A little colour came into her face. She looked rested and almost happy. I thought again of a jelly-fish with something hardening in its middle and I very nearly confided the simile to Nanette, but discretion prevailed over the effect of two pink drinks and one effervescent green one.

One of the port officials drove us in his new Citroen car as far as the road went and then we walked under the stars with the wind like a cloak behind us and the grass busy about our feet. The night was strong and wild. It belonged to Jean. Nanette had no place in it, but, to my surprise, she

hurried over the sand on her high heels and she did not stumble or hesitate. "One must have a little supper," she said.

"Shall I help you get it ready?" I asked as we reached the one-storied house, set deep and solid with its back against a dune.

"No," said Nanette. She went from me quickly and shut the door of the kitchen which leaned against an outer wall, and I stood on the wooden porch and stared towards the sea where I was sure Jean would be. He came up from the inlet with long strides and the starlight exaggerated the contrast between his hair and skin. White and black he looked as he came swiftly between the waves of sand. His arms hung straight and still. His shoulders did not move. His body had the effortless ease of an animal, and like an animal he could sit or stand for a long time without moving at all. I had often seen him lying on his face in the shade of a wall and no sleeping beast could have been more still. Jean said: "I am better, I think; I am hungry."

I gave him the red medicine and he did not laugh. He just pitched the bottle as far as it would go into the sand-hills and kissed me on the lips. He could not have been more indifferent.

Nanette came out and said supper was ready. We ate a silent meal and I went to bed in the small square room with mud walls tacked on to the house as an afterthought, but did not sleep well. In my dreams I was conscious of unusual sounds and when I shook myself awake, I heard somebody moving in the other bedroom. I thought that Nanette's sleeping draught was not proving very adequate, and then light steps went past my door towards the kitchen. I do not know why I went out into the passage, but I did, and there I met Nanette carrying a jug. "He is ill," she said. "I have some hot water." She appeared to be entirely col-

lected, but her words were vague, so I followed her into the bare room where she and Jean slept with the windows open and a gale blowing. I always imagined Nanette spent the nights with the bedclothes tucked over her head. I knew she hid a crucifix under her pillow.

Jean lay upon a blanket. He had no use for sheets. Sweat trickled down his forehead. His limbs were unnaturally rigid. He seemed to me to be fighting hard, but a curious, greyish pallor showed under his sunburn. I recommended the usual remedies for fever and an emetic as well. Nanette objected to the latter, but I mixed hot mustard and water on the chance that Jean would take it. Not unnaturally he refused. A bout of pain followed and I suggested a doctor. "You would have to walk to Djibouti," said Nanette, for she would not have a boy near the house at night. I replied that I would start at once, but Nanette said she did not know where the doctor lived and he could do nothing more than we had already done and Jean would be furious. While she repeated all this she looked utterly terrified and the night seemed to be turning upside down with so many unexpected happenings, so I did not insist. We continued our primitive ministrations and when at last the man slept, we sat together on Nanette's bed doing nothing.

In the morning, Jean was decidedly better. He demanded breakfast and Nanette insisted on making the coffee herself. I wanted her to rest, but with an exasperated exclamation, she shut the kitchen door in my face. There was nothing more I could do, so I dressed and went out of the house. In less than an hour I was in Djibouti, for the first lorry coming down the road gave me a lift. I breakfasted in the café with the gay tablecloths and spent most of the day wandering about the town, in which I had already a variety of acquaintances. When I returned to the house among the sandhills, Jean was unconscious. His wife said she had sent

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for the doctor, but he did not come. All that night, I waited in the sitting-room, for Nanette would not open her door. In the morning Jean died.

I do not know exactly when it happened, but about eight o'clock, while I was heating water in the kitchen, Nanette came out of the bedroom with a stiff, white face and said : "He is dead." Her whole body might have been made of wood. From me, she would accept neither sympathy nor help. She would not let me go near the room where Jean lay, lean, dark, no stiller than usual, but defeated at last, yet when I offered to establish myself at the hotel in the town, she looked as if I had struck her. "No, no, do not leave me," she said.

So once again I walked across the waste of dry grass and sand and having secured the necessary lift along the blistering white road, I stopped at the store which sold everything from camp equipment to peroxide. The young chemist was horrified at my news. "What a loss !" he repeated, with his palms flat upon the counter. "A real loss ! There is not another like Captain Jean. He may have been an outlaw, but what courage the man had and what force !" I asked for the address of the doctor and the youth immediately offered to conduct me to the surgery. "But," said he, "there will be nobody there. Doctor Bourget is away, for this new fever broke out at a camp along the railway. One could send a message by lorry and to-night perhaps the doctor would return."

To this I agreed and before accepting a prospector's offer of a lift back to the shore, I asked about the fever of which the whole town was talking. "It is like your influenza," said the young man, still greatly perturbed. "It beats you down all of a heap and in twenty-four hours you are finished. You must be a Carnera to stand up to it." For some reason, I found this conversation reassuring—I had not realized the

virulence of the local 'plague.' Wondering why I wished to be reassured, I climbed into the prospector's car, which resembled a rusty hip-bath, and was shortly afterwards deposited within sight of the de Broglies' house. As I walked towards it, I thought how desolate it looked with a poor attempt at a creeper splayed upon one wall and not a tree within sight. How like Jean to need only the sea and space. He was so sure of himself. He needed nothing but an opponent.

I called gently to Nanette as I crossed the porch, but she did not answer so I went into the sitting-room and there I found her, protected, as it were, among her frail possessions. The walls were white and so was her dress, but the curtains and the chair covers, even the ornaments, were pink, a bluish pink that I have always detested. There were pictures of flowers and dogs and children, a work-basket, a number of cushions and some shabby-looking plants in pots surrounded by paper frills. Jean never went into the sitting-room, but his widow sat in it, no longer upright, held straight and stiff by fear, but relaxed with her elbows propped on the table and her chin on her hands. She looked so crumpled and blank that I asked : "What's the matter ? What has happened ?" as if anything more could possibly have happened. Jean's death was like the last letter of the alphabet. There could be nothing more final.

Conscious of a dead weight in my chest and of a feeling of sickness which I could not explain, I seated myself beside Nanette. When I put an arm round her shoulder, she attempted to say something. Her lips moved, but no sound came from them. Suddenly, I knew what she felt and I was very much afraid. It was not the physical fear, like a rush of cold water, which Jean had often roused in me, but a horrible shamed feeling that crept into my brain like a worm and stayed there souring all my thoughts.

With the sunset came a hard-bitten little doctor, white with the dust of half a day's drive. His boots were caked with mud, and sand yellowed his clothes. Overworked and accustomed to the swift toll of the hot lands between desert and sea, he came with a certificate in his hand, but he was honest. His first glance, casual yet respectful, for Jean had been an Olympian to his fellow-countrymen, was succeeded by an inspection of the dead man's eyes. The result caused him to screw up his own. "What remedies did you give him?" he asked, and Nanette, who stood with me in the doorway, her body pressed against the wood, her hands flat against its unyielding surface, murmured something about a 'mixture'—the usual puny 'mixture' with which men try to stem the overwhelming assault of the tropics.

"But, Madame," insisted the doctor, "he has been taking some kind of drug." His eyes, tired, shrewd, disillusioned, looked first at Nanette, and then at me. There was a pause. Perhaps Doctor Bourget remembered tales of Jean's smuggling. Who would be more likely to have drugs at his disposal? The dead man had taken cargoes of them into Egypt, through the Canal, right up to the Golden Horn. But I was conscious of the appeal in the worn, yet still shapely body which held itself rigid beside me. From the moment of our first meeting, I had wanted to help and to protect Nanette. Later, I had acknowledged to myself that she had only one way of escape. If she had taken it, I had no right to interfere. In fact, I must, at all costs, save her. Unfortunately, I did not yet know from what she had to be saved.

While I meditated on the range of weapons at my disposal, the doctor's dissatisfaction increased. When he realized that Nanette was incapable of answering his questions, he pushed us both out of the room and shut the door.

I pulled the shaken widow on to the porch and provided

her with a chair. What composure she had immediately cracked. It was not a pleasant sight. As the mask peeled, I saw underneath it the face and expression of a child who has done something too terrible to contemplate. The eyes of a child, young, wise and totally inexperienced, gazed at me. "I killed him," said Nanette in a small, gentle voice. It had even a certain dignity, that voice. It was grave, surprised and frightened, but when it repeated: "I killed him, of course, I killed him," what had happened appeared to me inevitable. I looked round to see if anyone could possibly overhear, but the windows of the meretricious pink room were shut. Sands and sea were empty. They stretched to the horizon. The land with its insistence on form and boundary lay behind us.

In that moment of utter void, when I could neither think nor feel, I remembered the tense, dark beauty of Jean and his unconscious cruelty. I remembered also the pain, the terror and the quiescent softness of his wife, but I did not feel near to either of them. I wanted only to get away, to be free myself and untouched. But Jean had kissed my mouth and now Nanette was clinging to me. With both hands she held my arm and though she said nothing, I knew that she insisted with a strange strength upon my power to help.

When the doctor came out to us, his face was expressionless. Nanette gave one frightened look at it and leaned back, letting her hands drop palms downwards over the arms of the chair. It was as if she let something fall. Simultaneously all traces of emotion were wiped out of her face. I imagined a sponge rubbed over a slate. "She has given up," I thought with some indignation, and prepared to fight a battle in which I had no personal concern. In fact, could I have chosen freely, my loyalty would have been for Jean who knew so well how to live, not for the waif cloaked

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in a spurious peace, who did not even now know what to do with herself. But I had no choice.

"I want that bottle Madame de Broglie got from young Lucien in Djibouti two days ago. Where is it?" The doctor spoke to us both and his manner was abrupt. I remembered seeing the ribbed green flask on a shelf in the kitchen. It had not always been there, but I had certainly seen it when I went to boil water for tea.

"I will fetch it," I said.

Nanette did not move. Slowly I went across the porch, down the passage between the two main rooms and I had a curious sense of duality. I did not know exactly what I was going to do, but it was something essential and inevitable. As I passed the door behind which Jean lay, without the will to oppose whatever any of us choose to do, I felt a traitor, but Nanette needed my help. So when I reached the kitchen which leaned against the house like a bandbox, I shut the door behind me. In the uncertain light I could see very little, but there on a shelf beside the stove stood the bottle with the red label. It should have been full, for Nanette had had no chance to take a sleeping draught. I pushed my hand among the tins and boxes and took down the bottle. It was empty. For a moment I stood there and considered the evidence I held. Then I looked at the cement floor. Deliberately, I let the bottle slip through my fingers and it occurred to me that the sound of breaking glass might well be an explosive in which several lives would be lost. But with my heavily nailed shoes, I completed the work of destruction. I did not imagine the police of Djibouti would lick the floor, but I upset a bucket of water with a great deal of noise and returned, with soaked feet, to the porch.

"Well, where is it?" asked the doctor.

"I am awfully sorry," I began, and decided my voice

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was too high. "I fell over a bucket and bumped into the shelf. It's nearly dark in there. I am so sorry." This time I spoke slowly and with the right measure of regret. "But I'm afraid I knocked the bottle on to the floor." With a rueful glance at my feet which had left wet marks on the boards, I rubbed an elbow and added: "It broke."

"Yes," said the doctor, with unexpected mildness, "I suppose it would."

Feeling suddenly foolish, I nodded. There was a pause. Then the small, dusty man, dry as a stick, with nervous lines cut deep into his cheeks and forehead, took me by the arm and pushed me towards Nanette. "You had better put her to bed, Madame. I will see you both in the morning." Without another word he left.

The night dragged itself through a succession of hours. Nanette and I shared the room which had been mine. We did not like to disturb Jean by dragging the second bed from where he lay, bereft of the force with which he made antagonists and then defeated them. So Nanette slept on the canvas stretcher and I lay on the floor with the thin camp mattress under me. I did not sleep at all. But from the bed came the soft, quiet breathing of a child. Hour after hour passed and Nanette did not move. I was astounded that a woman who had killed deliberately and of preconceived intent could sleep like an infant. I wondered if she sucked the thumb of the hand which lay gently curved against her face.

When the first light came, green and cold between the cotton curtains, I got up and looked at the face on the dusty pillow. It was relaxed and still. I thought that its owner could not suffer much more. She had already known the worst and most helpless terrors. Nothing so fearful could happen to her in the future. The anguish which was the reaction of worn nerves had left her. Neither prisons nor

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the gallows could be as dreadful as living with the beautiful, relentless, impervious Jean whose self-sufficient isolation had crushed all that was sensitive in his wife and all that she most cherished.

While I looked at the small, blank face, defenceless in sleep, I was content with what I had done, but I realized that I should get no help from Nanette. If I wanted to save her life—and with it, now, my own security was involved—I should have to do it alone.

Before the sun rose, I had dressed and left the house. I wanted space. I wanted to be alone, but I wanted also to reach Djibouti as quickly as possible, for I must know exactly what 'Lucien,' the young chemist with the Normandy pippin for a face, had told Doctor Bourget. Because I was in such a hurry I made slow progress across the sands which tugged at my shoes, while every tussock of grass did its best to impede me, but a two-ton truck coming from rail-head at Dire Dawa took me the last six miles and, not long after the usual hour for breakfast, I presented myself at the store where I was beginning to imagine I had made the last purchase of my life.

'Lucien' thrust his way through a crowd of natives and asked with what he could supply me. I said feebly: "A chair," and with some concern, he retorted: "It is evident, Madame, that you have not slept. What a tragedy about the big Captain! You should have taken some of that medicine which I gave to Madame de Broglie. Then you would have had a good rest."

Presumably I stared at the amicable russet-coloured face which seemed to wax and wane in front of me. Strange and painful things were happening in my throat. "You had no right to give it to her," I said, remembering—as I would always remember—the glaring red label and the empty bottle marked poison.

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"Ah, Madame," protested the youth, "it was a harmless trick. I saw that Madame de Broglie was exceedingly nervous and I feared to give her the preparation she wanted. It was very strong. An overdose would have been murder."

"It was murder," I returned, and then I began to take in the meaning of the young man's words. Completely bewildered, I continued to stare at him and he also looked puzzled.

"Madame de Broglie was really not in a fit state for me to argue with her, so I thought it better to dissimulate," he said doubtfully. "I made up for her a little mixture of bromide and chloral—quite harmless, I assure you—and she went away with it, happy."

At this point I caught the surprised youth by the arm. "Did you tell this to the doctor?"

"But, of course, Madame. He said he would make the poor lady take a double dose of my medicine and then she would have a few hours' repose after the so tragic death of her husband."

The youth still spoke with a slightly bewildered respect, but he was intelligent and when I asked him savagely: "What *did* Monsieur de Broglie die of, then?" his face became grave and quiet.

"I assure you, Madame, *le brave Capitaine* died of this new fever which attacks the stomach."

I think by this time Lucien was holding my hand. Certainly, he leaned over me as I remained incapable of movement on the low chair and added: "There is no need to trouble yourself, Madame. My medicine, being a sedative, must greatly have helped the poor Monsieur Jean. He would have suffered much more had Madame his wife not given him a dose or two."

For a long moment we looked at each other. "The doctor—" I began.

Lucien patted my hand and with relief relapsed into slang. "The doctor smelt a rat as you say when he saw Monsieur the Captain's pupils, for, although I had already told him about the medicine I had given Madame, very naturally he did not expect to find so much of it inside her husband."

"Oh!" said I, in a voice which undoubtedly shook. Now that it was not necessary to save anyone—even myself—I had no idea what to do next.

The youth, with cheeks ablaze, decided the matter for me. "What Madame needs is some breakfast. Has Madame eaten at all? No? Then, if Madame permits I will come with her to the hotel."

Vaguely, I protested. Immediately, I must return to Nanette. With a certain amount of malice, I wondered what it would be like to discover one was as ineffective at taking life as at living it.

But Lucien, oppressed by a sense of responsibility, insisted: "No, no—Doctor Bourget is already on his way. There is nothing you can do, Madame, except to drink three cups of coffee—and *Dieu merci!*—it is to-day that they bake the brioches!"

Three Men in Chicago

SAVAGE AMERICA

CHICAGO, for me, means three men. Two of them were certainly remarkable and one was the victim of remarkable circumstances. There is no connection between the three except that one ministered to the law, one broke it with impunity, and the third was well on the way to being destroyed by this same law when chance and a detective's last-minute invitation sent me to his rescue.

All this sounds complicated, but it only means that, in Chicago, I made friends with a Lieutenant of the famous 'Flying Squad' and also with Spike O'Donnell, then Public Enemy No. 2. Later, I added the acquaintanceship of James Larue, fugitive from a Florida chain-gang.

This is how it happened. In London, I said to an Editor with imagination: "I want to see what really goes on after dark in Chicago."

Within a few days I was in possession of letters to the head of the Detective Bureau in America's mid-West capital and to the only racketeer who seems to have 'got away with it' in spite of the said Bureau.

"You had better see both sides," insisted my friend the Editor. "I wonder which you'll fall for!"

Arrived in Chicago, futuristic and non-committal, I established myself—with some trepidation—in a magnificently respectable hotel, dispatched my introduction to O'Donnell and awaited developments. Within a few hours of receiv-

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ing my missive, Spike appeared, tall, debonair and empty-eyed, superlatively tailored and accompanied by his lawyer, his bodyguard, inconspicuously but effectively armed, and a large section of the press, who photographed us with enthusiasm and recorded every word we uttered.

Prohibition having come to an end, I wanted to know how the lords of the underworld were contriving to 'get rich quick.'

"Believe me!" said Spike, clapping me violently on the shoulder, "there's been a lot o' whitewashing in this burg, but while the price o' legitimate liquor keeps as high as me hat, there's dough to be made in bootlegging, for most guys prefer a cheap drink to a square one. And I've not heard there's less cuttings in black hell, or less of those convenient deaths in the Dago quarter. As for 'snow,'¹ I could take you to a place where you'd freeze in it!" With that, Edward O'Donnell, beer baron and Beau Brummell of Chicago's South Side, refuted the theory that the great Middle Western metropolis has no more work for her admirably efficient police force.

With a broad smile and a vast cigar stuck between teeth that would be a credit to Hollywood, Spike continued: "If it's a clean sheet you're after, you don't have to look no further. Hasn't a jury just found me reputation pure as a lily and meself fresh and clean as new-mown hay?" His eyes, gay now and green, twinkled. An enormous diamond flared in his tie. Another, still larger, blazed upon a middle finger. "You know, sweetheart" (Spike liberally bespatters his conversation with terms of endearment), "this Vagrancy Act is like a dead mackerel on the beach in the moonlight. It shines and it smells, and when I saw six of my acquaintances tried as hoodlums and ivery one of 'em convicted, I said to meself, 'Spike, me boy, you're going to outsmart these birds

¹ Snow = cocaine.

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who want to iron you out as flat as a Chinaman does his shirts. There's going to be no railroading you into the Big House.' So I took a gander¹ round for the highest-grade lawyer in Chicago and that was Jay J. McCarthy of course. Believe me, lady, when he told me how much lettuce² he wanted, it set me back a few grands in my pocket, but the result was I beat the case and I beat it on the square."

From the other side of the table Jay McCarthy, as round and red and good-natured as Spike is lean and pale and elegant, beamed his appreciation. Apparently the ruler of a territory wherein, during a decade of gangster warfare, some four hundred men died mysteriously, never moved without his attorney.

"Sure, Rosita, there was plenty died in the bad days on the South Side. Maybe they were enemies of Spike's, but he'd nothing to do with it. They just got theirs and that's all there is to it, sort o' committed suicide, you understand." So spoke the cautious Jay, but he was interrupted by Spike :

"Aw, cut it out ! I'll tell you this, I've never put a friend on the spot and I've warned a good many what was coming to them."

The fourth member of the party which had moved into the grill was Spike's favourite bodyguard, little Gymp Rosenbaum, a wizened shred of a man, who never smiled and never changed his expression. He looked as if he had been dead for several days. His stillness was so intense that when, after an hour's silence, he spoke, the effect was extraordinary—"You don't have many friends in the liquor business," he said, without moving his lips. "I guess I'm the only man in Chicago Spike trusts."

"He's right," interrupted the Beer Baron. "Ninety-nine times out of a hundred, it's your friends not your enemies who put you on the spot, and if you get it in a car, it's from

¹ Gander = look.

² Lettuce = money.

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your pals all right, especially if you're on the front seat, but that's a spot to avoid, I'll say ! " Teeth and diamonds flashed. " It's like this with young hoodlums—find 'em, fill 'em up and as soon as their bellies are wrinkled, they're thinking how they can make a stiff of you ! "

We were lunching, at three in the afternoon, in a glittering but empty restaurant. The waiters were effusive. The manager spread himself under Spike's highly polished boots. The Mayor stopped for a few words on his way out. So did a police captain, but the latter's expression was not so well-controlled as the politician's.

" How often have you been shot at ? " I asked my host. " And do you get used to it, or are you ever afraid ? "

" I'm afraid of nothing except the sea and that's God's truth. I wouldn't get on a ship if you paid me, but as for these typewriters,¹ there's not a gun made that'll kill me. You bet I've got a charmed life. It's the truth I'm telling ye—I've never been afraid in my life, though I've been shot at as near as that corner there"—he pointed to a highly coloured mural decoration scarcely more than arm's length away—" but the third day afterwards, there's a sort of tensing down as you might say. D'you get me ? How many times have I been shot ? Aw, too many to count I guess. They was always mistaking me for a target—d'you remember that corner, Jay, when I was standing on the sidewalk and Mac² came along in his car ? He said 'Hello' and opened up with his typewriter. There must've been a hundred and forty slugs³ thrown, but I flopped⁴ so quick they didn't get me."

" Am I to understand that you never retaliated ? "

The man who is said to have rivalled Al Capone and who defeated MacErlane, toughest of all gangsters, smiled

¹ Typewriter = machine-gun.

² Mac = MacErlane.

³ Slugs = bullets.

⁴ Flopped = fell flat.

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broadly. "Well, when they was throwing slugs about, you wouldn't expect me to be handing out cream puffs, would you? Listen now and I'll tell ye—it was on the way to the golf course. D'ye know where the road has a little hump in it? There was seven of 'em there one day, laying for me. I didn't see 'em till I was right on top of 'em. Then I said to my driver—'Eddie, you get on—it's no use stopping,' and we went through 'em like a skirt after sparklers.¹ I wasn't touched."

"What happened to them?"

"They was most unfortunate—some time afterwards, you'll understand." Spike's green eyes grew hard. For a second they shared the same immobility as Gymp's. Then he relaxed. "The police used to stay out of the way when Mac and I went at it. There was one time on Sixty-Ninth Street when he nearly got me, but a month later we shook hands on it. I said to him, 'It was you that did the running' and he took it like a left and right on the jaw."

Jay McCarthy thought it was his turn, or perhaps he thought Spike was talking too much, so he opened up with: "Frank MacErlane was a killer all right, but he wasn't content with a gun or a knife. He'd torture a man all night and leave him in the river tied up with wire and with bits of him that ought not to be there—you understand—in his own mouth. The police were afraid of him. He'd think nothing of branding a man and cutting out his tongue. Once he found a tough from the West Side dumping beer in one of his saloons and he shot both ears off him. Mac used to stalk his prey like a bear and there wasn't one that got away from him. I heard of a man who got familiar with Mac's wife and that's the last *anyone* heard of him. There wasn't enough of him left to bury, which was a pity, for Mac was swell at funerals."

¹ A girl after diamonds.

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Spike broke in with : " He used to act pall-bearer to fellers he'd put on the spot, and I've seen him kiss the lips of a stiff he'd corpsed with his own hands."

Jay wasn't to be outdone—" Mac didn't need to do no kidnapping. He'd get 'em cold. He'd just call up and tell 'em to bring it along.¹ When they was together, all Spike had to say to anyone muscling in² on the South Side was : ' D'you want Frankie³ to come and see you ? He'll run all your greaseballs⁴ out of Chicago.' Did he make money ? I should say so ! Why, beer cost six to ten dollars a barrel and Mac used to sell it for fifty-five or fifty-eight. I guess he could make two hundred thousand dollars a year easy money."

" What's happened to him now ? "

Spike, reflectively stirring coffee, explained : " His wife and two dogs were shot one night. Nobody ever knew the rights of it. He used to call me up and swear he hadn't done it, but I'll say he was a bit mad. He fell off a boat and got pneumonia and died."

" What's the worst thing you've ever done ? " I asked Spike, when he was in the middle of his third cigar.

" Helped a fellow, I guess." No further explanation was forthcoming.

" See here, Rosita," said McCarthy, who had explained with the tomato soup that he never could remember surnames, " don't you get us wrong. Spike's all right ; he's never done time but once and that only for six months, 'cause he wasn't going to split on someone else. If he'd come clean, he'd never've seen the inside of a jail. Why, his father had a big teaming business round the yards, and Spike has made money in legitimate ways—haulage and contracting and real estate deals."

¹ The money.

³ MacErlane.

² Muscling in = interfering.

⁴ Wagons.

"D'y you get that word, le-git-i-mate? Sure it's a buckaroo, but if it's too big I'll take it back and give you three smaller ones!" interpolated Spike. "Sure my father thought I was a wild 'un and he wanted to cool me off, so he made me into a driver, but one day I wasn't having any and I delivered two truckloads of his best coal to the poorest families in the neighbourhood, instead of setting it down where it belonged. After that he was kinder sore with me!"

We then talked politics. Nobody can avoid doing so under America's New Deal. Like most men of action, Spike professed the heartiest admiration for President Roosevelt. "If the Federal and City Governments co-operate hand in hand, they'll clean up seventy-five per cent of crime throughout the country. Repeal has blown a lot of rackets. For the last two years it's all been in the red.¹ You can see what a handful of U.S. Secret Service men have done in a few weeks. There hasn't been one successful mail robbery and they've cleaned up most every big kidnapping case."

"You're forgetting the Lindbergh baby," I interrupted. "Do you think they executed the right man?"

"Aw, come off it!" instructed Spike. "You're not green enough to think that kid was kidnapped."

"What happened then?"

"Have ye never heard of a fine boy like that gitting impatient and taking a gander round by himself? Why, the kid just toddled down the stairs and out of the house as many another's done and they'd've been no sich boloney about kidnapping if they'd had the sense to look near at hand. Instead of which, they went scaring round the country, miles away, while the kid got itself lost in a wood and when it wouldn't stand up any more, a fox or a stoat had a crack at it——" Spike made an illustrative gesture with thumb and forefinger. "A baby's skull is a lot thinner

¹ On the wrong side of the ledger.

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than piecrust. And mind you, there wasn't a scrap of evidence for the kidnapping. It was just one grand police racket, after Lindbergh found his kid had crawled out of bed and shouted down the 'phone, 'He's been kidnapped' instead of 'He's strayed.' "

There was a moment's silence; then Spike turned to another subject. "In this very room, Senator Copeland, Chairman of the Committee of Crime Investigation, asked me how I'd stop youngsters from becoming hoodlums. I told him to separate the baby gangster from the hardened tough, 'cause the kid has more nerve in his little finger than the so-called machine-gunners in their whole carcase. The baby gangster starts out with petty thievery and he gets known as a tough 'go get 'em kid.' Soon as he bears that reputation, he's picked up by some leader who says, 'This boy's a sweet baby and knows how to go.' Then they use him where they're too wise to go themselves, you understand."

"What about the N.R.A.? Did it do any good?"

"I'll say it got a grand move on, but there was big business men out to make it stand for National Racketeering Act, and the Government had to get on to them pretty quick. Graft is just pie to this country. The whole of America's one big racket and it'll take more time to clean out the upper world than the under. What's business but a racket run on smart lines? The President's got his job cut out, but he's a big enough man to put it over. If he don't, maybe he'll be the last President."

In company with Spike O'Donnell, resplendent, affable but perhaps a trifle bored, and Jay McCarthy, earnestly determined that we should not miss a single highly coloured spot in gangster geography, I spent a 'night out' between the 'back o' the yards' and 'Hell's corner' (where mass murder piled the adjacent church steps with corpses and a

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baker's area with discarded weapons), between 'the death shop' (a harmless-looking florist's which had trapped several of Chicago's underworld) and the scene of St. Valentine's massacre, where seven of Bugs Moran's men were ranged against the wall of a garage and mown down by machine-gun fire. We ate kebab in a Syrian café which sells dope under cover of tobacco, while the ever-amiable McCarthy talked Arabic to the proprietor. We also ate subgum suey in a Chinese restaurant beside the Tong House where the Mayor of Chinatown, whose word means peace or war between fifty thousand of his compatriots, was playing Mah Jong in a cloud of incense under a satin umbrella, the altar of his gods ablaze with gold and jewels behind him. Between dustbins, we descended into apparently deserted cellars which were gambling hells, and climbed to attics over empty warehouses where the lumber was human.

Spike was comparatively taciturn. He is a family man, far more interested in his wife and four children than in the secret half of Chicago. Jay kept up a running commentary. " Spike's very religious. He wears a chestful of holy medals under his waistcoat. He's not interested in women——"

" I'll say you're right ! I've only had one gal in my life. And you should see my eldest daughter. She's fifteen and a peach. I'm going to give her every darn thing a father can."

" Spike's never taken a drink in his life. Isn't that so, Spike ? "

" Nothing stronger than coffee," affirmed the Beer Baron with truth.

" And see here," continued the faithful Jay J. " He's been in no racket except the beer——" and the next moment Spike was leaning out of the car, explaining how he ' and a bunch ' had sat up all night under a certain arch waiting for a load of whisky and how they'd raided the cars, tied

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up the drivers and pushed them into a dry culvert, before going off with 'the stuff.'

Undisturbed, Jay J. continued to defend his client, with such divagations as, "See that church, Rosita? One of the biggest lawyers in the city was shot there because the case he was on looked like being successful. Machine-gun bullets fairly ploughed up the text on that pillar. Now, don't you be mentioning any names, Spike." A mischievous voice murmured the lawyer's name in my ear.

"What's that? Don't you be talking too much?" enjoined McCarthy.

"Sure I'm not. I was just giving her some information about doctors. She's getting a cold in the head with all your talk."

There was a sudden pause. Both men stiffened. A tap on the glass and, in defiance of all traffic regulations, the driver swung the car round in its own length. Narrowly escaping collision, we raced into a main thoroughfare.

"Did ye see those men waitin' up the alley?" asked McCarthy. "D'ye think it was a hot short,¹ Spike?"

"I don't know—might've been," returned the other unmoved, but his green eyes had gone colder than the Arctic. He continued to smoke while he explained: "I've a nose for a wrong car when there's a heat on,² but nobody's got anything against me this time." Yet he was suddenly inhuman.

A few minutes later we were drinking legitimate beer in company with a patrolman, who seemed thrilled to meet Spike, at Nicolosi's bar, and the polyglot Jay J. was talking Italian to the proprietor—reputed leader of the Black Hand gang, responsible for the Italian quarter's average of nine killings a week.

Spike remained faithful to his coffee. Inspired by it, or

¹ Hot short = suspicious car. ² Heat on = police looking out.

by his *nth* cigar, he vouchsafed—"English gals is O.K. with me. If the shoe fits, dearie, I'll lend you me buttonhook."

"Come along," said Jay J., conscientiously consulting his itinerary. "We've still got sixteen places to go."

Two days later, in the company of an illustrious citizen, I called upon the Commissioner of Police and asked for permission to go out with the flying squad who by night patrol Chicago. At first, he said such things as: 'Impossible' and 'Women aren't allowed,' but after a while he considered the matter from another angle. "It seems you've been going places already," he reflected, with a glance at a newspaper lying on his desk. I saw that it devoted the front page to an account of Spike's and my nocturnal activities.

At exactly the right moment, the illustrious citizen put in a word. "She ought to hear the case for the police," he suggested.

"Even if it is the last thing she does hear," retorted the official with grim amusement, and he pointed to a wall lined from dado to ceiling with police badges. "Those are the stars of men in this division killed on duty."

My imagination drifted to a cemetery in Flanders.

"You really want to go?" asked the official.

"Yes—of course."

So I was given a note to the head of the Patrol Department and told—by the illustrious citizen—to keep my eyes open and my wits about me.

"They go like bats out of Hell!" That is the reputation of Chicago's flying squad—and they deserve it. To patrol four hundred square miles of a city which turns night into day is no easy job. Chicago has a population of three and a half millions and only five thousand police to deal with this heterogeneous collection in which Italians, Poles,

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Jews, Chinese, and niggers far outnumber the Anglo-Saxon element.

When the Patrol Department was first started it used to receive some seven hundred calls for help every twenty-four hours, and the average time between the receipt of an S.O.S. and the arrival of an armed squad car on the spot was six minutes. Now they get far more calls and the detectives pride themselves on reaching their goal within anything from thirty seconds to two and a half minutes from the moment they pick up the message. The result is that Chicago, with robberies reduced by fifty per cent and gangster killings becoming more and more unusual, has descended to thirty-sixth place on the crime roll of American cities.

"See here," said Lieutenant Charles Welling, squad supervisor, who took me round the Detective Bureau, "you just step inside this place and you'll get an idea of how we carry on."

We were in a large room, with a table down the centre flanked by seventeen men with telephone receivers in their hands. At the end nearest the wireless operator's box were two emergency officers. Along the walls sat the telephone girls who received the breathless and often incoherent calls for help. "Someone's breaking in—I can hear them; be quick, oh! help!! help!!! " The calm-voiced telephonist asks: "What address? Speak up there!" The message is switched across, according to district, to a man at the centre table. In case of murder, raid, or armed hold-up, it goes to the emergency officer.

Quick as thought, the recipient tabulates the S.O.S. on a sheet torn from the block in front of him—district, address, subject—and passes it through the window of the wireless cabin. Inside this I stood and watched the operator. Above his head was a map of Chicago divided into numbered sections. In front of him was an instrument with corre-

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sponding numbers on which the squad cars working in each district were represented by microscopic lights on the same system as a telephone exchange.

When a call came through: 'Hold-up at gasolene station, X Street and Wabash,' or 'Man with gun at 3125, B Street,' the operator pressed the button corresponding to the district in question and according to the numbered discs which flashed into light, he could see which cars in that area were at his disposal.

Consequently, as the messages came through—sometimes three or four together during the busiest hours between ten and midnight—the lights flashed up and down the machine, and the voice of the operator kept up a steady flow of instructions: "All cars look out for black Buick sedan, red disc wheels No. ——, stolen from 101 B Street" or "Cars 130, 17 and 52, armed men breaking into garage, C Street, at State."

Each message is repeated three times, and, according to its urgency, one, two, or three cars are ordered to respond. In case of riot, all cars in the area, and probably one or more from each surrounding district, are rushed to the danger zone.

Once, when a Communist march started on the South Side, twenty-five cars were in action within five minutes and five hundred men were mobilized within fifteen. Consequently the riot, to which several thousand niggers—armed with knives, broken glass, and such utilitarian implements as forks, shovels, and wood choppers—were ecstatically looking forward, ended before it had begun.

The speaker, carrying the red flag, had not even time to get up on his soap-box. With his first incitement to disorder, he was in an ambulance—being rushed off to hospital!

With Lieutenant Arthur Katt and two other detectives I

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was put into No. 41 of the Hoodlum (or gangster) Squad, which patrols all districts, visiting flash cabarets, bars, eating-houses and any other places known to be haunted by the underworld, and stopping suspect cars. There was a radio under the dashboard and a list of fifty stolen cars—that day's harvest—hung on the windscreen.

Each detective carried a revolver. Under the back seat were tear-gas bombs. These are used against armed criminals who have barricaded themselves into some space which the police cannot reach without certain and unnecessary loss of life. Bags of cartridges loaded with buckshot hung behind the back seat, and my feet were entangled in a couple of sawed-off guns, with repeating magazines.

Some of the cars carry Maxims and when the police have to storm a staircase or other position where the criminal is entrenched in command of the situation, they use a six-foot metal shield. "But it spoils your aim," said the Lieutenant, "you can't see to shoot from behind it."

"I suppose you're pretty used to shooting," said I, amazed at the courage with which these plain-clothes detectives go into action. Nothing stops them. They will drive ninety miles an hour over greasy or frozen streets, straight across red lights, right-angle corners taken with a screech of tyres but no braking, and it is a point of honour not to use the siren for fear of warning criminal or suspect.

They go into a hold-up—three or four against a gang—with the driver left at the wheel, his revolver their only cover. And they pay for their gallantry. Fourteen policemen have lost their lives on duty this year, and all that marks their heroism is a row of numbered stars hung on the wall of the Commissioner's office.

"Well, I'd say we've all of us been in plenty of shooting matches. It's our job," said the Lieutenant modestly, and then we were off with the radio intoning: "Car 15: Call

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your station" (probably for the purpose of receiving orders to arrest or pull in on suspicion certain shady characters found too near the scene of a crime). Our first stop was the depot of the 5th District at Wabash and 48 Street. It is the world's busiest police station, with an average of three hundred and sixty-five murders a year.

In the centre of the black district—where the niggers (forbidden under any circumstances to carry a gun) arm themselves with long single-bladed razors so that reports describe a 'cutting' instead of a 'killing'—it deals with some thirty-two thousand prisoners a year, approximately one-third of whom are women.

"We've had as many as twelve men in on murder charges in one night," said the Sergeant-in-Charge, and one of the detectives countered with: "In the Italian quarter, when two gangs were playing up, there were nine killings in one week—all on the same corner."

We looked at the cells, which resemble a square, heavily barred cage, cut into sections, and standing in the middle of a room so that there is a space all round and above it. The largest seemed to be crowded with cheerful dark figures who gave an excellent imitation of apes. One boy, cheered by chocolate-coloured friends, hung head downwards from the top bars. Another swung himself from hand to hand across the cell making suitable noises.

"The average mentality of the habitual tough is about six or seven years old," said a plain-clothes man, watching antics which would have done credit to the jungle. "These are all habituals. They're in and out most of the time. We have to charge them with something specific, or let them go within forty-eight hours. They get three meals a day while they're in—bread, sausage, and black coffee without any sugar."

A matron in pleasant sports clothes took me round the

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women's cells. There were only two occupants behind the bars which cut off half the room from floor to ceiling. One was a Pole who had just tried to strangle herself with a piece of ribbon. On the next bed sat a fashionable young person in black taffeta with transparent flaring sleeves. In another cell a Romany face looked out at us, proud and imperious under a scarlet handkerchief. Gold circles swung on either side of clear-cut features, and a voice of honey asked when its owner could go away. I had rarely seen such beauty of bone and line, and it was enhanced by the bright-coloured gypsy dress. "They tell your fortune and steal your purse at the same time," said the matron—but what a far cry from Egypt to a Chicago cell !

After leaving the police station, we visited cellars where men drank dangerous stuff under the guise of beer. We glanced into the 'Big House,' night club, not prison, where coloured and half-coloured yellow, white, brown, and black, danced to a thunderstorm of brass.

We answered—at a speed which left me considerably shaken—two fake calls. We heard "armed men creating disturbance at ——" and silently fled there, to meet another squad car on the threshold and nobody else in sight. We picked up an emergency order for three cars. "Man shot at ——" and found the victim was already very dead and his assailants departed.

Then, while we were progressing gently at some fifteen miles an hour through a desolate quarter empty of traffic, where the house-fronts peeled and the shutters hung awry over broken windows, a car shot suddenly out of an alley. It was a hundred yards in front of us and it was going full speed.

"That's a wrong one !" exclaimed the Lieutenant. "Go after it, boy !" We went. In a moment the speedometer registered seventy-five miles an hour. At this pace we

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swung into a main road, where tramlines were ribbons of ice amid the half-melted snow and grease. The suspect car must have seen us, for in spite of our efforts it drew away.

"They've a nose on them all right, and they can see out of the backs of their heads. Look—they've crossed the red lights. Keep going, boy !" ordered the Lieutenant.

We did so. The car in front took a corner on three wheels. We followed with a screech which seemed to combine the protest of metal, rubber, and glass.

"Gained a bit that time," remarked the Lieutenant, his hand in his pocket. Three more right-angle corners, taken at sixty-two and sixty-four miles an hour, and, with our quarry only fifty yards away, we plunged into a tangle of alleys. Down the narrowest we shot.

It was like going into a burrow. Out again into a wider street. The needle of the speedometer quivered at the top of its range. At a corner, netted in tramlines, a street car was crossing. Disaster seemed inevitable. There was no room to pass between a telegraph pole on the pavement and the approaching tram.

The lights were against us. Six yards from what seemed the end of everything the driver went into second without slackening speed—it was a synchro-mesh gear.

He flung the wheel over. In a series of incredible skids we swept—right—behind the tram;—left—alongside it; evaded a two-ton truck coming in the opposite direction, by a hair's breadth; swung left again in front of the still-moving tram, and at right-angles round the corner it three-parts blocked, all in the same second.

Never in any motor race have I seen such a miracle of driving.

By this time, cartridges, guns, and the occupants of the back seat were considerably mixed, but the Lieutenant con-

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trived to keep me from doing much damage either to myself or the splinter-proof windows, while the suspect car, hard-pressed, spun round another corner, just as the detective on the front seat fired point-blank at it.

"Sure, we're gaining——" said our driver, as everything from tyres to roof emitted a scream of strain. The occupants of both cars were now shooting.

We can't do it, I thought, watching the narrowest of all corners rush at us.

The next instant we were in a blank alley with no sign of our quarry. Dark passages loomed on either side. Down the first of these we plunged headlong, but there was nothing in sight. Back again with a clash of protesting machinery, but it was no use. The suspect had made use of those seconds.

"He's given us the slip," said the Lieutenant, after we had explored at racing pace half a dozen lanes that clamoured for a ten-mile limit. "Five times out of six we catch them, but this fellow had a good start and he saw us at once. What would you like to do now?"

It was 3 a.m. "Cars 47 and 32; man terrorizing two people at ——" droned the radio.

"Let him go to it!" said I firmly. "They can't be nearly as frightened as I've just been."

"Well, what then?"

"Food, of course." A Jew, in an almost sky-blue suit, was selling hot dogs (sausages) flavoured with garlic, under the flare of a naphtha lamp. "Let's buy him out," I suggested.

That was not the end of my acquaintance with Lieutenant Welling and the optimistic Lieutenant Katt. One evening, when I was dressing to go to a very special party, the telephone bell rang. It was a police call and within a few seconds I was connected with the squad supervisor at the Detective Bureau.

"I've been trying to get you before. You should come right down. There's a big show-up on and you'll surely be interested." The voice was so friendly and so convinced of my assent that I made only the most feeble protests.

"Oh, it's the real stuff and worth seeing. We were sure you'd be wanting to come." I imagined a faint disappointment in the voice over the wire, and I answered at once: "Of course."

"Make it snappy," said the Lieutenant, and with a sigh of regret, for the most intelligent young man in Chicago had sent me orchids and another with less brains but more looks was due to call for me in ten minutes, I put down the receiver. Off came my best frock. Silver shoes were kicked under the bed. Thriftily—for I haven't yet learned to treat orchids with disrespect—I put the exigeant flowers into water, and in exactly eight minutes after Lieutenant Welling had urged me to hurry, I was in a yellow taxi speeding down-town.

The companion of my more legitimate 'night out' met me at the entrance to the police-station where I noticed a couple of detectives, with what I took to be artificially stunted repeating rifles, hastening into a squad car. With Lieutenant Katt, I pushed through a mob of reporters, policemen on the defensive, idlers, synthetic lawyers, and citizens who could not get a place, and so into a bare, whitewashed room with a stage at one end. The gloomy apartment was filled with rows of respectable townsfolk, cab drivers, small shopkeepers, clerks, mechanics, bar-tenders, charwomen—all of whom had within the last few weeks been the victims or witnesses of some form of robbery, ranging from petty larceny to armed hold-ups resulting in murder.

I was given a seat between Lieutenant Welling and another detective at the end of the front row. A group of police-

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men stood on our right near an open door through which others continually passed. In front of us, across the whole width of the hall ran a narrow stage, brilliantly illuminated by footlights, and backed by a curtain marked like a giant foot-rule.

The identification parade began. Up the steps on the farther side of the platform slouched half a dozen human beings, apparently bereft of feelings. Automatically they ranged themselves in front of the numbered divisions on the backcloth. As directed, they turned left, right, and with their backs to the audience. They took off their battered hats and caps. They put them on again. Then the detective in charge asked of the respectable citizens crowded together, for the most part uncomfortable and doubtful: "Any identification? Take your time. And speak up, please."

One hundred and thirty-six men and four women were pilloried in this fashion, but none of them seemed to mind it. There were sots with their mouths hanging open, berry-brown negroes scarred by innumerable fights, Latins, yellow as nicotine could make them, collarless, with filthy clothes hanging loose upon their bones. There were obvious thugs with jaws and boots equally square and, in sharp contrast, flashily dressed confidence men, Hebrews in brilliant blue suits fitting like second skins and third-rate gangsters with quivering eyelids and spittle at the corners of their lips. These were habitual criminals, and of the women, three were 'molls,' tawdry and over-painted, and the fourth a wizened little pickpocket with false teeth and hands fine as a bundle of spillikins.

"That's the usual sort o' bunch we get. They're in and out all the time," explained Lieutenant Katt at my elbow. But the hundred and thirty-seventh man was different. Slender and well made, neatly dressed, clean and pitifully respectable, he looked like a clerk accustomed to being

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hungry. He wore his shabby clothes well, but he moved with the dumb obedience that expects to be beaten.

"There must be a mistake," said one of the detectives. "That man's not a criminal." He hunted through the papers he held. Then the finger-print expert came in and there was a whispered conference.

The hundred and thirty-seventh suspect could not see what was happening across the footlights, but he must have guessed something, for his whole body drooped as if there were nothing inside it and he could hardly hold himself on his legs.

The detectives looked up at him with interest and concern.

"There's a telegram just come through. That lad's escaped from a chain gang and Florida is claiming his extradition. A hard break for him—we pulled him in on a trumpery charge made by some woman who's lost a brooch. Like as not, there was nothing in it, but we took his prints as a matter of routine, and if they fit, he's for it now."

"But he's half dead already," I protested. "He's not the type who could stand a chain gang." I remembered that the southern roads are the best in the United States and they do not cost the tax-payer a penny, for they are made by prisoners. Men, condemned to years in a chain gang for an offence that would gaol them for a month or two in England, are penned like animals, fed worse than galley-slaves, and with heavy manacles riven permanently upon them, are forced to work as machines, but under the whips of overseers while the sun flagellates their wounded bodies.

The boy—he was only twenty-two—slipped off the stage. He was taken away through the door on my right. I could see his hands twitching. He went hopelessly and I knew that his terror was too heavy a burden for him.

"Please let me speak to him. I must see if I can do anything," I begged of my detective friends, and Lieutenant

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Katt took me into a place like a station waiting-room but with barred windows.

After a while the boy was brought in handcuffed, but everybody showed a good deal of sympathy for him. One of the policemen patted him on the back and told him to pull himself together. But he could not obey. So they freed his hands and left us comparatively alone.

Slowly, and impeded by gulps which never developed into the sobs I expected, James Larue's story came out. At twenty he was a garage mechanic, but at heart an artist, taking courses at a night school. When he got his first work as an architectural draughtsman, he married. Then the slump came. With thousands of others he found himself on the streets. He did odd jobs as a sweeper, as messenger, anything to keep a roof and a bed. A friend offered the two of them a lift to Florida and they went, hoping to find some kind of employment in the summer camps. Near Miami a hotel-keeper gave them lodging in return for fourteen hours' work a day. They lived on scraps and what fruit grew wild.

Here is the rest of the tale as Larue himself told it. "I used to go out and pick oranges and guavas where they hung over the road. My wife was going to have a baby and she needed more food, so I used to keep my eyes open for any chance. One day I noticed a deserted bungalow among the fruit trees. A window was open and I looked in. There were some odds and ends of canned stuff thrown in a corner, so I clambered over the sill, but when I was inside I thought better of it. So I crawled out again, and before I'd time to speak two men got hold of me and beat me up. Then they arrested me for house-breaking. I had no money so I couldn't hire a lawyer of my own, but the police told me if I pleaded guilty I'd get off with a reprimand under the First Offences Act. Instead, I got a sentence of five years in a

chain gang and no chance to appeal or even to see my wife. First they sent me to a farm where it wasn't so bad. I worked as hard as I could, but in a fortnight they put me on the roads, where they needed all the labour they could get. The camp where we slept, chained on a sort of bench, was in the middle of the swamps near Indian Town. We were chained night and day, so that we could never walk properly and we could never get any rest. The iron ate into our ankles till we went lame, yet we had to go on working at a new road through the swamp. I got fever at once and was awfully sick, but they kept me at it. The food was the same every day, bread and beans with bugs in them. It was so bad sometimes we used to throw it away and do without. One day I couldn't use a pick at all. My arms were like jelly and my eyes went queer, so they dragged me in front of the boss and he knocked me down and kicked me with his heavy boots."

Later, I saw the marks on the wretched youth's back. The shape of the cleated sole was still distinguishable.

James Larue continued, his words coming in a rush now as if he feared interruption. "When I couldn't get up they said I was pretending, and they put me in a sweat-box. It's like a coffin, just about as narrow, with bars at the top and in front. The sun comes in all day and the wind and the rain. You can't move. You can't even sit down. When they remember, they push a mug of water and some bread through the bars. A man's not supposed to be left in the sweat-box for more'n twenty-four hours without a doctor inspecting him, but they left me there for nigh on three days, and then the men struck. They wouldn't do no more work until I was taken out and sent to hospital. I thought I was dead." Without a pause the man hurried on: "I don't know how long I was there, weeks I think, but when I was better I had to go back to the gang. They

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were working near an Indian village and the squaws used to come out and watch us. Sometimes they gave us fruit. There was a young one who seemed sorry for us. One day she brought me a guava and in it I found a file.

"For days I sawed away at my chains, whenever I got a moment or two with nobody looking. At last I got through them, but I had to wait for a chance to make a break. So I hooked the chains together with wire, covered them with tin-foil from a package of cigarettes, and went on waiting. After I'd been six months with the gang I found myself working right at the end of the line, with water on my left and the nearest guard forty yards away. When he turned his head I had the chains off and was into the marsh like a coot. He fired, of course, and I kept ducking away from the bullets as if they were hornets.

"For a week they trailed me with bloodhounds, but I was three parts under water and the scent wouldn't hold. Bit by bit I covered the eighty miles through the swamps to Miami. It took me over a month, and I'd nothing to eat but the roots and berries that grew wild. I was about naked till a tramp gave me a bit of sacking. Then I fell in with some hoboes and they fitted me out and showed me how to jump a goods train to Chicago. There I got work and I sent for my wife and baby. I've been working ever since, till this dame says I took her brooch, which I haven't even seen. She'll find it maybe to-morrow, and her mistake'll railroad me back to—that—hell—" There was a pause between each of the last three words. The speaker seemed to be suffocating. "Can you help?" he said at last. "God! Can anyone help?"

I asked the same of Lieutenant Katt, that quiet, keen, clean-shaved man, square of bone and single-minded, who was never in a hurry, yet always in command of the situation. I don't think I've met many braver men and it didn't

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occur to him that he was brave at all. "You can get him a straight lawyer and fight the extradition," he said. "I can tell you nothing'll happen to him for a few days. For they'll have to send officers from Florida with a warrant and the Governor here will have to sign it before we let the boy go."

I went back to my hotel and rang up the most puissant personage I knew. He was at the party I had forgotten. So I hurried into silver lamé and remembered the orchids, and I had supper with the puissant personage. Sitting on a fat sofa, with cushions of all colours piled behind us and an English butler arranging caviare on a superlative table for two, I told him about James Larue.

"I don't know which is real, him or this," I concluded in desperation, "but they can't both be!"

The puissant personage wrote a name and address upon the back of the menu. "I don't suppose the man told you the truth. Once they're 'in', they never do. However, Grenville Beardsley is about the cleverest young lawyer in Chicago. He'll get Larue out if anyone can."

The case went on for months. In fact, there were three cases during which Larue remained in a Chicago gaol.

In the first court we won. Young Beardsley's eloquence roused a wave of sentiment. Should the slavery, abolished by the guns of Bunker's Hill, be revived in the chain gangs of Florida? Should a son of the North be surrendered to the lynch law of the South? On what legal point the judge chose to set aside the Governor's signature, I do not know, but the popular press supported the verdict. Caught in the general enthusiasm the woman who had lost her brooch withdrew the charge against Larue. He was within reach of freedom when Florida appealed against what we should call 'the magistrate's ruling.'

I was in despair, for Larue did not make a good appearance

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in court. He was too weak, too much afraid. In one thing only he showed fight. He would not reveal his wife's address or the name under which she had found refuge. "I won't have her brought into it," he said. "She's done nothing and she isn't going to be dragged into a police case." So he deliberately deprived himself of a weapon, for the warm-hearted Chicago public would have adored the spectacle of a twenty-year-old girl—with a baby, of course—fighting for her almost equally youthful husband's salvation from 'worse than death'—a description I have always suspected.

In the court of appeal we lost as we were bound to do, for Larue had pleaded guilty to the Florida charge. No sentiment could weigh against the law as administered impartially by the high court judges. But Grenville Beardsley hung on. Press and public rallied to his support. One of the most famous American lawyers, long retired, offered his assistance. By what legal device, I know not, but the case went to the Supreme Court, and there we won it on a quibble. For the Florida authorities, suspecting no opposition, had hurriedly filled in the forms requiring the extradition of James Larue on a charge of 'breaking and entering,' for which he had received a five . . . sentence. In their haste, they had omitted several necessary words, including a date, *what* the accused had 'broken and entered' and whether the sentence was for *five* days, months, or years. By these three slips James Larue was preserved from extradition.

Six months after I saw him, too terrified to control a single muscle of his body, he was watering flowers and mowing lawns in a plutocratic suburb of Chicago, generally with a photographer in attendance. The puissant personage who was a cynic wrote to me: "I hope he keeps out of trouble long enough for Beardsley to win his next case!"

Spike wired at great length and some expense. The gist of the message was that 'English gals were still O.K. with

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him' and when his reputation was next unjustly assailed Jay J. and I could 'split the lettuce.'¹

Lieutenant Katt said nothing except that the law was fine if you knew enough of it. He shook my hand warmly and asked in what city I was next going to give the police 'one grand time, with not a blue moment in it!'

¹ Share the emoluments for the defence.

Appointment for Murder

NEW GUINEA

LONG, long ago New Guinea seemed to me unlike any other place on earth. Now of course I realize that the port at which I landed unobtrusively from a tramp laden with copra must have resembled a hundred other corrugated iron townships scrambling over hummocks of sand.

It was in the 'dry belt,' and one of the first things I saw as I walked up from the quay, followed by a magnificent head of hair with my suitcase balanced on top of it, was a figure in neat white, having what I took to be an epileptic fit on the beginnings of a sidewalk. Negligently the native set my luggage in the dust, looked round for a piece of wood and with it forced open the victim's teeth.

"Is that a good thing to do?" I asked, disturbed, and an English voice reassured me.

"It sort of loosens him up. I'd say he's had a pretty wet night."

Unmoved, the new-comer indicated the way to the hotel. "There was a bit of a row there yesterday. You'll get a room all right."

At the moment I did not see the connection between the two sentences. Then I noticed a flag at half-mast.

The hotel consisted of cubicles clustered together without apparent plan. Built of the ubiquitous sheet metal with the partitions concluding some feet below the common roof, it echoed everything that had ever been said from one end of the

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building to another. On hot nights, I used to imagine that no words could ever escape. Once uttered, they continued to resound as a background for more recent conversations. It seemed to me, for instance, that behind the argument going on in the next tin cell as to which of two obviously incapacitated gentlemen should take off the boots of the other, I heard a dozen different discussions belonging to years long past. Strange information came to me haphazard over the walls that so inadequately fulfilled their purpose, and with it the feeling of two entirely different aspects of life. There was the daily business round, commerce, agriculture and banking, or, in simpler terms, tinned goods and bales of gaudy cottons, overdrafts, bills of lading, hemp, copra and the latest about the missionaries. But behind such regulation intercourse expressed in the fewest possible words by men who appeared to read nothing but price lists, there were sentences which had no direct meaning, but which left me with the sensation of things ragged and raw.

If it is possible nowadays to get away beyond the reach of organized travel there is invariably I think, for the sensitive mind, this consciousness of duality. For, just as the savage is uncomfortably and without specific comprehension aware of what we call civilization, so the dwellers on the edge of our ordinary horizons must appreciate, without understanding, the existence of other planes.

In New Guinea, therefore, while I listened to estimates, to planters and traders cleaning their teeth or looking for bugs, I was oppressed and excited in turn by the realization that anything might happen. Life had a different quality. It might be profoundly dull, measured only by temperature and a lack of ice, by the arrival of the next boat, or the deficiencies of local labour. On the other hand, it might suddenly run off the track altogether.

I would never have been surprised to hear a shot above the

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incessant clinking of glasses which began at sundown and continued far into the night, but the only violence I witnessed was when a youth threw a hurricane lamp at an imaginary snake and, with this unusual missile, felled the bank manager. Equally, I heard of devils, I heard of witchcraft, but I saw nothing more inexplicable than the three-card trick.

At midday, with the consciousness of six hours' work effected, or satisfactorily postponed, the notabilities of the port would gather on the hotel porch. Gin slings and Doctor Funk cocktails produced a general feeling of ease. Collars sagged and linen coats showed signs of wear. The dampness spread to ideas, which became shapeless, genial and a trifle unusual. It was good sport seeing how much newcomers would credit about a land they inclined to believe hard as the roofing above them.

I had to take my turn, and no doubt the planters got a good deal of fun out of my alternate credulity and intolerance. But one day a new element came into the interminable discussions, and it was introduced by a young man who drove up to the crazy tin hotel behind a pair of horses that looked as if they had never been broken. The buckboard swayed like a raft in mid-current. When it came to an unexpected halt, the team attempted with well-directed kicks to reduce the structure to its component boards and spokes. The driver shouted at them, and, after doing a certain amount of damage, the horses became quiescent. Like sheep they suffered themselves to be driven into the few feet of shade under the porch. Their owner stamped up the steps. He was laughing, but his eyes, which met mine direct, were full of an entirely different emotion.

By this time I was used to the most ordinary people expressing sentiments that would have condemned them to a lunatic asylum in any country where thought is measured by reason, but I was definitely intrigued by the contrast between the

effect the new-comer intended to produce and the unconscious revelation of his eyes.

Silence had greeted the arrival of the buckboard, and it was a peculiar variety of silence. The dozen men who had been talking indolently of vanilla, fever, indentured labour and the chance of a good skin if a panther came down from the range, stopped in the middle of their formless sentences. They were suddenly interested. The proprietor, a big man, loose and creased, with his face falling in folds until, without much visible neck, it impinged upon his chest, asked with exaggerated carelessness: "Anything doing your way?"

The other men looked at their shoes or their empty glasses. I thought they were ashamed of their curiosity, yet so eager to gratify it that they would not acknowledge the vague discomfort roused by the hotel-keeper's question.

"I'm still alive," said the new-comer, and went into the bar. With him went something strong and wild and very much afraid.

The bank manager moved cautiously, so that, without upsetting his chair, of which several parts, usually considered necessary, were missing, he could talk in low tones to the doctor. "His luck's holding all right—" I couldn't hear the rest of the sentence.

"It's not the sort of luck I should like to have myself," retorted the doctor, who habitually overworked.

At this point, so far as I remember, I could no longer restrain my curiosity and, unlike the men who for the last ten days had been showing me all they considered suitable in and around the port, I was not in the least ashamed of it. "Who is he? What's the matter with him?" I asked.

They told me his name, and to the second question they answered with one voice: "Nothing." The two syllables sounded extremely blank.

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"Why does he look like that?" I insisted, and they retorted:

"Like what?"

No doubt by this time I was glaring at the relaxed white figures spread over a singular variety of chairs, but they were not going to talk.

It occurred to me then that New Guinea might be as surprising as I had imagined it when, somewhere in Australia, I had bought—quite unnecessarily—a revolver and a deck passage for the least known Papuan port. If, till that moment, I had been struggling against a vague disappointment due to the absence of cannibals and other legendary appurtenances of the tropics, due also to the obvious lack of any opportunity for 'taking one's life in one's hands' as they do in the best South Sea stories, the arrival of the sunburned young man, with the gayest of smiles and terror in his eyes, cheered me beyond reason or good manners.

"What does he do?" I asked, for what people do is a comparatively safe subject compared with what they think or indeed with any of the curious complexes which make up their beings.

"Who? Jim Staniland? Grows hemp. Twenty miles inland." The eyes of the speaker suggested muddy pools sunk between banks of swollen flesh, but they held a certain shrewdness while their owner chose his words in order to supply information without explanatory circumstance.

"What else?" I persisted.

The subsequent silence was broken by the doctor, a kindly red-faced man with stubbly hair thrusting out in unexpected places and a throat crinkled like a concertina. He supplied what I wanted. Before doing so he made a pattern of glasses on the nearest table. "Maybe a great deal, maybe nothing. Depends how you look at it." There was a pause. "In my opinion," continued the tired, dry voice, "the man's waiting to be murdered."

After so much lapse of time, I can't remember what I felt. I had not then realized that morality is a matter of latitude. I had not met the gaoler of a Cambodian women's prison, who said to me : " It is such a hot country, and husbands are very trying—it sees itself, they must one day get assassinated," or the Brazilian warden who, asked whether there were any thieves among his charges, expostulated indignantly that it was ' an entirely respectable prison, for murderers only.' Eastward, westward, the point of view changes with the value of life. In Uganda, a native condemned to the gallows accepts death as part of the day's work, and his fellow, fined a few head of cattle, shrieks the roof off the court-house. But at the time of my visit to New Guinea, death, which I could not possibly envisage as affecting myself, seemed to my twenty-year-old mind permissible only with the due appurtenances of age and certified illness. Therefore I asked more questions, leaning forward to the peril of my chair, wondering, of course, if they were laughing at me.

The proprietor of the hotel, whose voice I can still remember because it came from a rich distance, extricated as it were from depths of fat, interrupted as if he had not heard me. " Staniland's had too many lucky escapes. It won't last. The next time they'll get him." His profession, which often depended on his powers of speech, rendered him less cautious than the banker and the doctor, both of them accustomed to reticence.

The speaker shook his head, thus disarranging the fatted wadding which precluded a collar, and in the tones that a plum-pudding would use if it could speak, he continued. " There's an enemy after him." In spite of the tolerance produced by a mixture of drinks, the statement seemed in need of amplification. While the little red doctor protested as one felt he might do when a patient announced his intention of dying, the hotel man sought to elucidate the situation, but all he

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contributed was a gloomy, "And nobody knows who it is." The banker, I thought, looked relieved.

Then the subject of our conversation came out of the bar. In another moment I had been introduced to him. He had very light grey-blue eyes and I did not enjoy looking at them. They were part of a nightmare and I hadn't then read Freud, so I still considered there were things one should neither talk about nor show. But the rest of the young man was delectable. His sunburn hadn't the greenish-yellow tones common to my friends on the porch. He was tall and lean. He looked hard. Even his dusty hair—brown was it, or pollen-coloured?—seemed very much alive. And the result of all this appreciation, mutual, I hoped, was that within half an hour I found myself balanced on the driving-seat of the buckboard behind a pair of horses intent on suicide, with my battered suitcase flung in behind and young Staniland beside me explaining, while he dealt with brake and reins, that I couldn't stay any longer in that hole, that I'd be much better off on the plantation and that his wife would be glad to have company.

I thought a lot about that wife after we had safely negotiated the first slopes which seemed to me more hummock than street. It was evident that she ranked large in my companion's mind. He liked talking about her and he did so most of the time, while his uneasy eyes flickered over the road with the effect of a lizard darting its tongue at flies.

Jim Staniland asked me a few questions, but I don't think he listened to the answers. He wanted to talk. Probably I owed his invitation to the fact that he had to talk to somebody who knew nothing about him. I heard a great deal about crops and the geographical formation of New Guinea, all the old tales too of the surveyors who had reported the natives beyond the Owen Stanley range to have tails because they had seen the long ends of bark loin-cloths flying out behind fugi-

tive black bodies, of the legal luminaries who were puzzled as to what crime a savage had committed if he ate a corpse conveniently killed by someone else. But generally we came back to the subject of his wife, whom I shall call Clare, because all the Clares I know have been original and brave. Stimulated by the unusual situation, I was prepared to believe the wife must be both these and brown as well. I insisted on somebody dark and quiet and restrained. I suppose it was my unconscious revolt against the dramatic, which I then felt should be confined to the stage.

After some miles the dry belt gave way to the jungle. Large-leaved trees supported thickets of creeper. There were hanging flowers, birds overbalanced by their beaks and others with tails like a burst of flame. It was very nearly what I had expected of New Guinea, and my satisfaction made me oblivious of the road. The buckboard skidded in the red slime and its driver had difficulty in controlling two horses mutually antagonistic, and with the temperament of mules. "Don't worry," he said at intervals, with what must have been a mixture of kindness and detachment. "I've got at least nineteen lives and I've only used about nine of them so far." I wasn't worrying; the twenties when unintellectual are surprisingly immune. But I realized that we were within reach of an understanding. So far my companion had used words to cover his thoughts. What his feelings were, I had no idea. But the jungle, pressing close upon us with its hot, damp breath and the clatter of great leaves, encouraged intimacy. Both of us were relaxing. I did not try to ape the indifference of the men on the hotel porch when I asked :

"What do you mean?"

And I was rewarded, for the long young man beside me who should have been so ordinary, said in a thick, uncomfortable voice: "Oh, I've had some queer shaves." After a pause which must have covered a mile's slow and slippery

progress, he added : " You wouldn't believe me if I told you. Nobody could."

In that green tunnel striped with sunshine, windless yet full of hurried noises, with birds that I had been accustomed to consider only as hat-trimming blazing across what was left of the sky, I could believe anything, and I said so. But the strain was not very great, for young Staniland gave the barest and most barren outline of happenings which, described in other words, might have been unbearably dramatic. There had been a queer taste in his coffee one night, but the cook was notoriously careless. He used any old rag as a strainer. A gun had misfired at a moment when, apparently, its owner's life depended on the accuracy of his aim. A snake had been discovered in a room adequately netted, and it had disappeared in a manner which made it difficult for 'some people' to believe it had ever been there. The recital continued in a studiously commonplace manner and I was mildly embarrassed by the feeling of repetition. There was nothing new about the circumstances described. They belonged to the well-thumbed pages of ships' libraries and to the ragged ends of conversation, years old, that I imagined caught among the dust and the echoes of the hotel we had just left. I suppose my face registered more than it had any right to do, for the man laughed, none too cheerfully, and remarked : " It does sound idiotic, doesn't it, and so unimaginative—" While he spoke, I had to acknowledge there was no particular reason why a murderer should possess originality, but I remained prejudiced against the familiar. In a surprised voice, my host added : " But it's true," and for no reason at all I found myself forced to believe him. It *was* true then. But even so, it was silly.

Following his own thoughts, without any consideration for mine, Jim Staniland concluded : " Whoever he is, the fellow must be getting a bit sick—" But there was no conviction

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in the words, nor, I thought with the confidence of my years, was there any reason to be so afraid. If there had been attempts on the man's life, they had been clumsy enough to rouse ridicule rather than fear.

On impulse, I asked : " What is it really ? " I meant that he was not the kind of man who would be terrified of physical danger and he understood. In the silence which followed, I felt he was arranging his ideas so that he could put them into words.

" I'm not much of a talker," he said at last, and paused. " It's that I don't know. I don't know anything. Why should anyone want to kill me ? There isn't anyone. That's the point. There is nobody at all."

A branch had fallen across the track, a branch as large as an ordinary tree. I held the horses while my host hacked a path round it. The strokes echoed away into the forest, and I was conscious of, without actually hearing, a cacophony of other noises, for the silence of the jungle is compounded of infinitesimal sounds that are seldom separately recognizable. When we had negotiated the obstacle, my host continued : " There was an Australian up here once who'd been cursed by a black jinn. How he got away with it at all I don't know, for accidents with him were as regular as sundown. He spent most of his time in hospital. If a tree fell, it was always on him. If a blade came off a machine, it went straight for him. There isn't a train on the island, or it would've run over him ! "

" Do you believe all that ? "

" I don't know."

" What happened in the end ? "

" His house was burned. So were his wife and children. He went away."

" And was shipwrecked, I suppose ? "

" Maybe."

" You ought to go home," I said, and at that moment

England, where major uncertainties are limited to influenza and the income tax, seemed to me desirable.

"Oh, no, I'll stick it out and see what all this hoodoo's about."

At this moment the accident happened, and had my mind not been full of murderers and curses, it would never have occurred to me that there was anything unnatural about it. The horses shied. That was all.

We were jolting along a narrow road which hung over a ravine. At a corner, while the wheels were slipping between breakers of wet mud, something startled the off horse. It plunged wildly against the other, and for a moment I thought we must go over the edge. With my eyes shut, I clung to the seat. The buckboard tilted and I visualized the water racing over the rocks a good way below. Then the vehicle righted itself, pitched forward and I was thrown head foremost into some branches. They were agreeably resilient. Unhurt, I extricated myself from the cloying mass of leaves. Their polish seemed to adhere to me, but it might have been spiders' webs. I was brushing my face when Jim Staniland pushed his way past me into the jungle. He had a revolver in his hand and he asked repeatedly : "Did you see it? Did you see it?"

Behind him on the road I could see the buckboard upset and the horses struggling against the bank. There was nothing else.

Foolishly, I stood among the creepers and waited for more to happen. I had bumped my head. It began to ache. I heard several shots behind me. Then the man, whom I was beginning to think must be mad, returned and said : "It wasn't an animal."

I stared at him without comprehension and he jumped down the bank and began to unharness the horses. "It's less than a mile now," he shouted up to me. "We can walk. I'll send a boy back for your bag."

Confused, with my face unpleasantly sticky, I scrambled on to the road. A minute or two later we were walking down it, each leading a horse. "Why did you shoot?" I asked, for that to me was the only strange part of the accident.

"Why do you suppose the horse shied?" retorted my companion.

"They do," I said vaguely.

"Something was thrown at it, a stone perhaps, no, something softer. It went over the edge, I think. These days I don't miss anything. I'm always on the look out."

His voice was strained. Looking round the horse's head, I saw his face and was surprised because fear had spread over it like a mask. Awkwardly I spoke of seeing too much. "It was just an ordinary accident," I insisted.

The man retorted: "When I went past you into those creepers, there was something close in front of me. I could see its bulk and I emptied my revolver right into it."

"Well, it's dead then," I said, and wished we were out of the forest. The trees pressed too close upon us and they were walled with parasites.

"It must be dead—I was as close as I am to you. But it went on—"

The horses stopped. They were sweating hard. We stared at each other across their damp noses. For me, the palisade of jungle had become the tin walls of the hotel. Again I was conscious of standards and qualities beyond my comprehension.

"It isn't possible," I said, and my companion answered wearily, but without anger:

"So many things aren't possible, but they happen."

The plantation house stood on a rise from which the forest had been cleared. Immense red poinsettias made an agreeable background. I had an impression of whitewash and a wide verandah. Then I saw the river very dull and sluggish, like

oiled silk laid across the darker green of the jungle, and beyond it the hemp.

There were a few English flowers, looking out of place, and on the path leading to the house an enormous black bird so gorged that it couldn't fly. "They sit about waiting for an animal to die. Then they get down to it," explained my host.

He stood between the horses, looking young and tired, and he seemed to me deliberately to arrange his expression. "Don't say anything about this—I mean it was just an ordinary accident."

A woman came out on to the porch, and she was satisfactorily brown, or perhaps amber would be a more suitable word, the clear, reddish-dark kind found in the Caspian. The tones of her hair and her skin were of that same sombre quality and her eyes were hazel. She was not really very striking until she smiled, and then there was no getting away from her.

That first evening I was grateful to her for showing no surprise either at my arrival or the manner of it. She just asked if I'd like tea or a drink, and showed me a room that we would call unfurnished, but it had a camp-bed in it. "I'll put up some curtains if you like," she said, but she did not apologize for deficiencies. Always, it seemed to me, she kept her words for what she thought essential, but she was able to say a lot without words. I am trying now to remember what she wore, and I can't, because her clothes never mattered at all, nor, curiously enough, did the furnishings of her house. She would have been just as important in a station waiting-room. For she was one of the few women I have met who do not need a background.

Later that evening I was introduced to the two assistants. One of them was good-looking in a rough, coltish way. He had an immense length of limb and a bitter mouth which I found attractive. So dark that he looked painted, he moved with an abandon which left buttons all over the place. His hair

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fell over his forehead. His shirts gaped. Sometimes string took the place of his belt. I liked his voice.

The other assistant, suitably known as 'the ineffable Tubs,' was the most good-natured person I've ever met. I don't think I learned his surname, but I remember how he rolled along the verandah, surprisingly agile for his shape, making no sound on the uneven boards, and immediately the atmosphere lightened. When Tubs smiled, everybody followed suit, and even that first evening I thought nothing could go seriously wrong while about the place there was such an absurd, engaging person, looking exactly like two eggs, the smaller balanced upon the larger, without any intervening neck.

Seated on the verandah, with frogs croaking and insects gathering under the roof, we talked about the accident. Tubs, who evidently had neither imagination nor powers of invention, said it must have been a monkey, and reminded the Stanilands how 'you can fill them full of shot and they won't agree they're dead.' His comfortable tones suggested clotted cream—I've always thought voices are very like food—and he wanted to go out there and then to look for a corpse which by this time would have climbed a tree and be hanging by its tail.

But Clare looked straight at me with those colourful eyes of hers, and asked : "Did you see anything?"

In the silence which followed the question, I chose to find significance, so, instead of blurting out "There wasn't anything to see," I explained that I hadn't had a chance.

Tubs asked me if I always shut my eyes in emergencies, and I replied in the affirmative, adding that I generally opened my mouth at the same time 'to have it ready, you know!' They laughed at me, but I noticed the glance which passed between Clare and the dark assistant whose name was Alan Robertson. That glance was the beginning of the story as I evolved it in a mind fertilized by the atmosphere of New Guinea, and there was little else till I made a fool of myself over the bridge.

Perhaps I ought to acknowledge at once that any part I played in the lives of the four people I have described was limited to participation in the accident, genuine or engineered, and to the uneventful fortnight which followed it, but, indirectly, the mistakes I made may have contributed to the final solution. In any case, that night I felt very much in the middle of the story, and when, after dinner, Clare and the saturnine Robertson wandered out into the strip of garden, and I saw them talking earnestly under a succulent moon, I felt the mystery was solved. Here were all the proper ingredients—an assistant in love with a planter's wife, and opportunity in the habits of the country, for, if I couldn't have magic, I was determined to saddle New Guinea with the responsibility.

Next day, they all told me what they were going to do to the garden and what it would be like in another year. My host then took me to see hemp, acres of it, or miles of it, like tall green spears thrust hilt deep into pineapples. It is an illogical plant, so far as appearance is concerned. We rode slowly on large unwieldy horses, reminiscent of hippopotami, and I carried a sun umbrella over my head. With us came a couple of boys, coal black and naked but for a piece of string to which one had appended a live rat that he intended to eat later on.

Towards noon we saw a group of the same Guri Bari boys, imported for so many years' labour, enjoying a meal of uncooked rodents. The sight did not encourage my appetite, but some of these savages were magnificently built and they had Roman features. I watched one shooting with a bow and arrows and thought he should have been transferred to a frieze in Judæa.

On the way back, I made acquaintance with the bridge. It hung forty feet above the river where crocodiles looked like tree-trunks, and it consisted of wire netting strengthened at intervals with laths or branches. The structure wasn't more than three feet wide and it sagged in the middle like a hammock.

There was a rope overhead which the nervous could hold while crossing, and the whole thing was attached by four loops of strong wire to the bank on either side. We crossed it, leaving the horses to come round by a ford, but, in view of the crocodiles yawning because lunch was late, I did not really enjoy the experience. As we went up to the house, the planter explained how easily one of the wire loops could be removed from the posts sunk deep in grass and what the effect would be.

That night Robertson made Turkish coffee and Tubs handed round the cups. There was a general shifting of positions. The host, whose stories had enlivened a tinned meal, went out on to the verandah. A few minutes later his wife followed him. She returned with a face like wet sand. The tall assistant looked at her once across the table and then pushed it out of his way.

As inconspicuously as possible I went out of the nearest window. It was dark behind the creeper-covered posts, but a voice which I did not recognize drew me to a corner where my host, prostrate in a canvas chair, made sounds and movements equally devoid of meaning.

While I stood irresolute, Tubs called to me to come and look at the fireflies. Unwillingly I went, and the egg-like young man was reassuringly casual. "Touch of the sun," he said. "Lucky you had an umbrella."

When we returned to the house, Clare was saying to young Robertson things like: "I can't bear it any longer. We must end it. There must be a way—"

Well, what could be clearer, I thought, but already I was under the spell of Clare. She was infinitely cool and assured. She volunteered nothing. She neither explained nor excused. So, needing a murderer, I had to select the dark Alan, who was so tempestuous and uncertain that I felt such a trifling matter as assassination might well go into the waste-paper basket of his mind with all the other litter he had collected. For Alan's

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ideas were surprising. He would argue about international politics or religion, about Rabelais or Bach, or Treitschke's influence on Bismarck. He possessed, among a pile of biographies and histories, most of the famous murder trials, and he knew how every criminal had come to his end. He knew also, for he was a conceited young man, at what point Mary Stuart could have held Scotland and Louis XVI averted the French Revolution, but these matters seemed to me irrelevant.

With my mind saturated by the trials which I read at night while huge toads flopped about the floor eating beetles, it was easy for me to see Alan behind every homicidal attempt, but I don't know why I was so sure he would eventually succeed by means of the bridge.

My only disappointment was that nothing happened for so long. I stayed on at the farm because Clare said she liked having me about. They were all very kind to me. On the surface, each of them seemed glad of my presence, yet, from the second or third day, I was convinced that one among those four people—I did not know which—wanted me to go. It was a fantastic sensation, for the Stanilands and their assistants took a great deal of trouble both to entertain me and to make me feel how much I pleased them. "We had almost forgotten how to laugh," they told me. "Even Tubs had ceased to be a joke. But you, you are utterly delicious—" This was when I had been taken to a native feast and had voiced ingenuous disappointment because the flesh offered me on a banana leaf proved to be authentic sucking pig and not the unwanted girl baby I had suspected.

In spite of such approbation and the fact that all four apparently delighted in my company, I could not rid myself of the feeling that one of them would go to any lengths to terminate my visit. No doubt all this sounds very imaginative, but the tropics, when they are still more or less virgin,

are apt to develop sensibility. Day after day I considered my companions and wondered in which of them I had aroused such antagonism. Of course, if Alan were the murderer, I had the explanation at once, but from the moment of my arrival he had seen in me something which might amuse Clare. He was obsessed by her needs and delighted when he could satisfy the smallest of them. So if she wanted a visitor, somebody with whom she could be irresponsible, a toy in fact, I must certainly stay. Alan appeared to me as a bold, imaginative character, full of intricacies. He had a brain and he knew it wasted on hemp and vanilla, but his will kept him rooted on the plantation. He was never two days the same. His impetuous moods carried him up and down the scale of human emotions. Nobody knew if he would return from his work in the wildest spirits or the depths of depression. But he was always interesting. He could argue any problem equally well from standpoints diametrically opposed. "But which do you believe?" I would ask.

"Neither," he would retort.

Anxious as I was to see in him the murderer, I had to acknowledge that he showed no signs of stupidity, and surely such repetitive failure to kill indicated lack of brains. There were times when I longed to confide in Tubs. He was the sort of person in whom everyone always does confide. But he evidently admired the senior assistant to a degree which made it impossible for him to criticize. Tubs had no originality. He never speculated. For him no situation had more than one meaning. He read Edgar Wallace with enthusiasm and thought the Salic Law concerned duties on salt. I adored him. So did everyone else.

Now we come to the ludicrous affair of the bridge. One morning Clare, whom I chose to consider an unconscious victim, talked at some length to Alan instead of dealing with the household emergencies which always piled up after break-

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fast. The senior assistant then went hurrying down to the river, the natural way to the hemp plantations, and I followed, for no reason at all except that the situation and the whole atmosphere of this forest clearing had affected my nerves. It happened that I reached the bank in time to see the young man bend over one of the wires which, wound round a post among the undergrowth, supported the crazy structure of the bridge.

Without, I hope, full consciousness of what my actions implied, I waited until the man had gone on downstream in the direction of a new pineapple plantation, and then, feeling both ignominious and furtive, I crept forward to examine the wire which I imagined would be hanging loose. At this moment Clare's voice sounded above me: "What are you doing?"

With my hand outstretched, I turned to her, and I noticed her pallor, but she had said all she intended. Clare's strength lay in the fact that she always made the other person explain. This time, however, I was saved the necessity of invention, for Alan reappeared, and there we all three stood looking at the bridge.

"I am going across," said Clare.

Alan did not move or touch her. "Better not," he said, and his words seemed to erect a barrier between us and the strip of netting slung across the stream.

"I'm very light," returned Clare. "I can hang on to the guide rope."

Both of them stood quite still. They made no gestures. Clare might have been ordering the household stores, so even was her voice, so parsimonious her words. But I recognized the imminence of a crisis, for the woman, I knew, would try to cross, and the man must somehow prevent her. But he did not. He said: "You may be killed," and then he hesitated. The diffidence of the person who sees always a dozen different sides to every question overcame him.

Clare went down to the river and I found myself screaming

after her, yes, actually screaming, without any control at all : "Don't go ! Stop ! He's done something to the wire. I saw him——"

My incoherence produced an unexpected result, for Clare and Alan turned to me with anxiety but no surprise. One of them asked : " You actually saw him ? "

Clare said sharply, " When ? "

Discomfited, but too amazed to be aware of the full tide of humiliation which later overwhelmed me, I stammered : " Just now—before you came——" I suppose other questions followed, for at last, wishing I were a thousand miles away, I found courage to insist : " It's true. I did really see Mr. Robertson doing something to the wire." I think then I sat down. My knees had been shaking since the beginning of the colloquy.

Without a word, with an exactitude of action that I found admirable, Clare examined both posts. " The wires are all right," she said, and waited. I don't think she would have said any more, but the assistant had exhausted his scant stock of patience.

" It isn't this side we are worrying about," he said. " I had a look this morning and it's O.K. But we don't know what he's done to the other end."

All the different qualities of amazement that I felt merged into the relief of reprieve. The man had not understood my accusation. Bewildered, I asked : " He ? Who ? " But I didn't really want to know. I only wanted to get away, and my legs were singularly unresponsive. There I remained, glued to the bank, while Clare looked at me gravely and for a long time.

Then she said : " You tell her, Alan," and went away.

The senior assistant leant against a tree and, regarding me as if I were rather less than a sausage-bug, said : " So you'd got it all fixed up that I was a murderer."

The shock of finding that he had understood put me, figuratively, with my back against the wall. "Yes," I said, and I am afraid I added: "If you aren't now, you probably will be."

"Only if you'll consent to be the corpse," he retorted, but neither of us laughed. "Oh, it's too bloody," said Alan, "and now you've butted in, I suppose she's right and you've got to be told." He had changed again and was a young Savonarola destroying what he loved. "Staniland is taking some sort of dope, and when he's under its influence he isn't sane. He thinks somebody's out to kill him, but there isn't anyone. He knows that, when the effect of the stuff wears off. You saw what happened the other day when the buckboard upset. The horses shied as they're always doing, and the boss imagines a plot and goes blazing into the bush at nothing at all."

"He saw something," I protested, without belief.

"And fired six shots straight into it and there wasn't a body?" insisted a relentless voice.

"Tubs said it might have been a monkey."

"Tubs is an ass and the best on earth, of course. But he is an ass. Staniland's the boss, and that's the end of it. If he saw his precious employer gorging the damned stuff, he wouldn't have the guts to stop it. Tubs is a bloody fool, too decent by half—there's nobody to touch him."

After this extraordinary statement we remained silent, but Alan was still seething. When, after vain efforts to co-ordinate my thoughts, I said: "I don't understand about the bridge," the man looked at me with increased distaste and retorted:

"I told you Staniland's got this damned silly idea he's being hunted. One day he pulled off the wire on the other side as soon as he got across, so's nobody could follow him, and then he forgot all about it and near as nothing killed him-

self trying to re-cross. He was hanging on to the guide-rope, with Clare watching and nearly off her head, till one of the boys managed to lasso him——”

“I thought Clare and you——” I began, and stopped, terrified, for Alan’s face seemed to me to be decomposing. Simultaneously, it turned slowly red, not a plethoric turkey-cock red, but a horrible dull colour like earth and blood mixed. I felt I looked at something primal and secret and that if I saw any more I should be overwhelmed by a passion too elementary for description.

Yet all the man said was : “ You must be mad,” and he said it with such conviction that I agreed with him.

Humbly, I decided that I must have been at least unbalanced, but Alan would not be propitiated. “ Can’t you see when a woman’s in love with her own husband ? Clare’s obsessed. Why else d’you suppose she stays here with Staniland and struggles to keep him sane and goes off the deep end when, like this morning, he sets out for the hemp obviously crazed with this hellish stuff he gets from Lord knows where. We watch him all the time, but he beats us. When I’m rushed with the blacks, Tubs acts shadow—not that he’s any good, of course——” Frowning fiercely, the senior assistant considered the inadequacies of his junior, while I also thought that Tubs wasn’t much good except to be loved, but he made people happy. Surely that was enough.

Eventually we walked a long way down the river. For the first mile we did not speak, because I was still trying to arrange my thoughts. One of them eluded me, and it was important. At last I had it. “ Listen, Alan,”—it was the first time I had ventured on a Christian name—“ I know I’ve been an awful fool ; I suppose I read too many stories on the way out, and you must acknowledge the country is odd, the jungle, I mean, and those awful birds taking the place of sewers, and the bats, thickets of them with their heads down—they look so evil, and

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the trees talk all the time. When there isn't any wind at all, the leaves move as if they were just going away. It's a waiting sort of country, d'you know what I mean? You can never be sure of anything. Well, what I want to say is—are you sure Mr. Staniland gives himself the drug? I mean, anyone else might be giving it to him."

The senior assistant looked as surprised as a schoolboy. The years fell from him. Forced by his nature to argue, he said: "Who would play such a dirty trick?" and then: "What would be the point of it?" ending in more certain tones with the planter's own contention: "There *isn't* anyone."

When I heard repeated that desperate self-conviction, I forgot about the tall, fierce youth beside me, and with my feet among pineapples and my head in the clouds pursued the tail of that elusive thought. If somebody else was administering the drug, it would explain why, alone among the inhabitants of the plantation house, the manager was dominated by a single emotion. I had been conscious of innumerable cross-currents. Alan, his subtlety revolted by the obvious, was angry and bitter; Tubs harassed, unbelieving and a trifle defiant, his good nature proof against suspicion, his sound common sense disturbed. Clare showed no signs of disillusionment. I could only imagine the relentless alternation of confidence and terror that would have destroyed an ordinary woman, but which left her apparently inviolate. Only Staniland was physically afraid and had the courage to acknowledge it. This attitude seemed to me altogether out of keeping with the position and character of a man who was deliberately administering to himself a dangerous drug.

Staniland dominated the situation because of the strength of his fear. None of us ever really got away from it and the only time I wholly understood it was when the planter suggested the occult. I could easily comprehend being terrified of

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forces against which there is no known redress. All this I tried to explain to Alan and in part he agreed. "I hadn't thought of it like that, but I suppose one might take the wretched stuff and then forget about it."

Still among the pineapples, he said: "D'you suppose any of these blacks would have the nerve to administer a drug? They'd use an arrow or a knife if they wanted to get rid of us." The hopeless discussion continued. We forgot about lunch. It was late in the afternoon when we returned to the house. Clare provided eggs for tea, but neither on that day, nor any other, did she talk about her husband to me.

When I left for the coast, she said: "You've been great fun. I wish there was no steamer for you to catch. Come back again. We like having you," but in that odd way of hers, her hands, her eyes, her whole body said a lot more.

I went away with my head full of Clare, and, when the occupants of the hotel porch asked for news, I told them about the village feast and the Guri Bari boys, the like of whom they saw every day of their lives. With unction I described a native dance by moonlight under coconut palms when the lacatois, grain laden, had returned in triumph on the monsoon. They were very bored.

Two years later I heard the end of the story. It was not entirely by accident, for, whenever I met anyone from New Guinea, I asked about the Stanilands and Tubs.

In a London restaurant, the bank manager, home on leave, and still uncomfortable in the atmosphere he had so much desired, answered my questions as briefly as possible. The planter and his wife, oh, they were all right, on top of the world in fact, now that it had all been cleared up. "How?" I asked breathlessly, and the man whom I had thought could never be embarrassed made superfluous movements ending in a confusion of cutlery.

"Tubs is dead," he said curtly.

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"Oh——" I said on a high rising note, and then : "What's that got to do with it?"

"He was killed by a panther. The beast went for Jim, who wounded it in the shoulder. Then it turned on Tubs, who seems to have been so staggered by this that he was late in putting up his rifle. Both barrels misfired. The brute got him down and mauled him. He was finished before Jim could put in a second shot."

The Bank Manager applied himself to his food. Perhaps he didn't mean to say any more, but I sat beside him, frozen in spite of the heat, and I asked no questions. After a while, he was obliged to end the silence. "Afterwards they looked at the rifle Tubs had been using. It was Jim's." A pause. "I can't tell you how he came to make such a mistake. That rifle had been loaded with blank. The panther should have got Jim all right." Another pause. "It would have been an accident."

Hastily I thrust a spoonful of caviare into my mouth, but I couldn't swallow it. "Not Tubs," I mumbled, and then, incoherently : "Tubs couldn't be a murderer. It's impossible."

"I dare say it is, but it's a fact," retorted the Bank Manager in disagreeable tones, and he explained how, when they searched the room of the fat, good-natured man whom everybody liked because he had never done an unkind thing in his life, they found a store of the drug which had been introduced into Jim's food.

"But why, why?" I asked, feeling a certain comfort in being definitely mad with nothing to be done about it.

"He wanted the plantation. He'd done his best to buy it through an agent and Jim had turned down the offer." By this time I must have looked completely stupefied, for I remembered the price of hemp.

"It wasn't for the land," explained my companion, with his

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eyes on his plate, and then in a queer, ashamed voice : " He'd found crystals in the river. A fool ship's captain told him they were diamonds. He was such a fool himself he had to believe it."

He had been a fool of a murderer too, I reflected. ' Tubs was never any good except to be loved.' Hadn't I once said that ? Conscious of the Banker's embarrassment, suspecting an additional moisture about his small, pocketed eyes, I realized that he must have regarded ' the ineffable Tubs ' in much the same light.

The Penitent and the Desperate Situation

MEXICO

CHICHICASTENANGO in Guatemala must be one of the loveliest places in the world. It is the most enchanting little town, or perhaps only an overgrown village, with houses painted pink, white, and yellow, but mostly a clean sugary white, and it scrambles over a little hill at the foot of green mountains with delicious Indian houses clinging among the pine woods. We arrived there on the day of a great feast. I think it must have been Palm Sunday, or Pentecost, for long before we reached Chichicastenango we found the fine, reddish roads, that hurled themselves so bravely over humped ranges and through valleys full of bananas and brilliant tropical flowers, crowded with Indians, many of them carrying their gods on their backs.

The people of each village wore a different costume, but the general effect was of little dark men, with soup-plate hats on their heads, wearing shorts of thick black woollen stuff bordered with all the colours of the rainbow, waistcoats equally brilliant and brief coats heavily embroidered. They looked like autumn flowers in a border, for they favoured the reds, blues, and purples, the flaunting yellows of dahlias and chrysanthemums. The women, as far as I remember, wore a multitude of skirts folded round their hips, striped skirts and flowered ones all finely worked and of different colours. They also had the short swinging coats and blouses

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covered with embroidery. On their heads were gay kerchiefs and round their necks rows and rows of glass beads that must surely have come from England. Many of the beads were so large they looked like small moons.

Some of the men carried on their backs statues made of wood and clay. It was odd to see an angel's wing protruding behind the small secretive Indian head, smoothly shining and shaped like a coffee berry. Sometimes the holy images had the most peculiar faces, painted violently red and white, and their eyes glared with the savagery of the Mayan or Aztec deities. But the tiny little Indians pouring along the road in considerable heat and dust were very kind to their gods whom they were taking for an outing. They covered their heads with leaves and dusted them, and sometimes even offered them water, and when they sat down to rest they propped their divinities upright so that they could have a good view of the road.

Other little men were carrying leaning towers of pots for the market. All I could see of them was a pair of shapely dark legs with calves like cricket balls twinkling along under a ladderlike erection hung with dozens and dozens of red clay jars.

When the women, who had been resting in the shade, rose suddenly to their feet, I felt as if a crowd of carnival balloons had broken away from their strings. In all the lovely hot colours, with a background of coarse black wool, the women floated down the road and they were no bigger than children. I would have liked to linger all day among these small fantastic people, some of whom had been trudging through the night across mountains and valleys, but when I reached Chichicastenango I realized they had been no more than the prelude to enchantment; for at the top of the hill there opened a wide white square. The houses were simple and one-storied. There were feathery trees, some of them break-

ing into strange blossom, but the flowers could not compete with the colour poured upon the cobblestones. Every inch of the square was covered with a Persian carpet, or a bright Paisley shawl of people.

There were quaint little booths of branches or match boarding, that looked as if the first gust of wind would blow them away, and these were heaped with gaudy stuffs and necklaces, with spices, fruits, and the queerest edibles, with knives and twinkling tin pans, painted jars, and hats the size of cartwheels, and clothes so tiny I thought they could only have been worn by dolls. But most of the sellers sat close together upon the cobbles with their bright wares, gourds, berries, clay pots full of a raw and strictly forbidden alcohol, dyed goatskins and a quantity of saffron, red and orange powders spread in front of them. Between the seated figures flowed a gentle and unhurried tide of old men and young men, women and girls, all of childish stature but well developed, with fine features and muscles starting out of the legs with which they climbed to their hamlets under the clouds.

I had never seen such reckless blazing colour, and for a long time I stood in front of one of the mud-built, white-washed houses, beneath a clear blue sky that looked as if it had been freshly washed, while I gazed ecstatically at the human design which could never be reproduced on a canvas or a loom. Then I realized the peculiarity of the scene. There must have been several thousand people crushed into the square. They had come miles across the mountains to buy and to sell. Most of them were moving mushroom-like under their big hats, with a glint of sunlight on the eighteen-inch knives thrust into their girdles, or else like the painted sails of ships gliding effortless on the tide, but they made no sound. When I became conscious of the silence I found it startling. For quite close to me men and women

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made all the motions of talking, but their voices were so low I could not hear them, and they moved equally quietly on their bare feet or in the soft leather sandals that at most made a ghost of a whisper in the dust.

This extraordinary silence added the final touch of unreality to the scene which was too bright, too splendid to last. At any moment I expected the little men, so gorgeous in their stripes and embroideries, to disappear into the earth, and the still smaller women blooming in the colours of tropical flowers, to be caught up into the branches where their prototypes spread petals of purple, blue, and a rich warm flame.

Before this could happen, before the market could lose any of its intricate living threads, I went away—down one of the quiet white streets that shone in the sunlight. It was more a lane than a street. The cobbles stood up like cottage loaves and the quaint little houses looked as if they too had been washed and set out in a toyshop window to dry. There were peepul trees at the end of the lane. At least, I think they were peepuls—tall and feathery with branches delicately drooping. Behind them rose a steep flight of steps, sugar white, and each step was a hill in itself. At the top was a smooth white space from which soared the walls of a church. A great door opened towards me as I approached and through it I could see a warm darkness lit by hundreds of candles. These were so small that they gave very little light and behind them, around them, the rich darkness heaped itself towards the roof.

All the way up the steps knelt the little Indians in their gay clothes. They also were burning candles, and beside them they had set the gods they had carried upon their backs from far-off mountain villages. They were not very beautiful gods, for the Indians had begun to carve them in the image of Christian saints, but had added the expressions

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of the old gods who still stood hewn in stone upon the highest peaks. Violent and fierce they looked, painted in crude red, yellow, and green, but round their feet and the hems of their trailing robes were heaps of rose petals.

The petals made a pathway from the foot of the steps to the church door. On either side of it clustered the doll-like Indian families, dark, sombre, and very intent as they arranged their groups of candles, shielding them from the wind, or making small sweet-scented fires on which burned herbs that exuded a smoke like incense.

It was a lovely sight, for the Indians were so happy with their gods and above them rose the slender white church winged with steeples. I felt tender and very young, as if all that I knew had been stripped from me. I would have liked to worship with the simple intensity of the Indians who had spent nearly all they possessed on the candles and fresh paint for the lamentable faces of their gods.

Softly, making no sound in my ancient shoes, I approached the steps and then I saw a man standing alone and upright beyond the last smoking fire. He was neither Indian nor European. He stood as still as the painted statues gazing up at the church. He was tall and beautifully built with a very neat head. His hair looked strong and smooth like sealskin. His shoulders drooped, but they were broad. His body tapered to the narrow hips and the long, lean legs with the muscles moulding the tight trousers. He wore a short black bolero that fitted him like a skin and a dark felt hat. His trousers were thrust into dusty boots embroidered round the top. They were shabby and they crinkled in concertina fashion round the ankles. The sun shone through the branches and showed the worn surface of his clothes. He was very thin but when I had passed him and turning, could see his face, I realized that poverty and hunger would not matter to this particular man. For he stared up at the church

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with a strange lost look, as if it had long been his home but he had been forbidden to enter it. His expression was so curiously compounded of sorrow and pride that I stood still for a moment looking at him. His distant eyes met mine and before I had time to think, I said in Spanish : " Will you not come into the church ? "

The man did not take off his hat. He said : " No, señora, but my prayers go with you."

From the main door to the altar ran a highway of pink petals. Far away under the image of Mary there twinkled a constellation of wax lights set in saucers, but the great church was lit by the river of candles planted among the rose petals. By their flames I could see the dark and terrible pictures of martyrdoms in which the Spanish Indian soul, responsive to pain in all its forms, apparently delights. But I refused to look at the torments and the atrocities, the exaggeration of blood and horror on the smoke-grimed walls, for beside the stream of petals knelt grave little Indian families. Each had its own wooden god, and to him they addressed the prayers that would have been too unimportant for the grand Lady above the altar, or for the splendid but very tortured saints affixed to the pillars.

I heard one old man saying to the highly coloured image he had surrounded with candles : " Oh, God, you are not listening. It did not so much matter about my mother. She was old and had to die, but now the heifer is missing and if you do not help us to find her, she will be eaten by panthers in the mountain."

All the toy people who had walked so far to give their own gods an outing and to do honour to the strange, great God who made carts fly across the sky without horses and who lived behind the huge white sugar-cake of an altar, with music and sweet smells at his feet, prayed in the same simple fashion. They asked to be protected from the storms

in which they heard the voices of the old gods who had not much power left, and from wild animals into whose bodies, if they were not careful to hang a crucifix above their heads while they slept, and wear a sacred medal upon their swart, hairless chests, their spirits might go at night. They consulted their images about the marriage of their sons, and whether a neighbour had stolen the black bullock with the boil on its rump. Sometimes, if the matter was important and the crudely painted god seemed to be indifferent, the head of the family who prayed for the rest—in the simplest possible language, as if he were doubtful of Olympian understanding—would stretch out a strong dark hand and shake the image standing among the petals, not angrily, but as if he would force it to pay attention.

When I left the church with its river of candles flowing into the dim, quiet pool about the altar on which floated Mary the Mother of God, I found the man in black still standing under the tree. His hands were clasped in front of him, his narrow head bent. I thought perhaps he prayed, but when I asked an Indian, very splendid in candy stripes with a white jacket heavily embroidered, how I could find my way to the inn, the man in black looked up. He said : “It is quite close. I will show you.”

Together we walked under the drooping trees and the soft clear sky from which all but a few cloud fragments had been brushed. It was so clean, like the setting for Copernicus at Covent Garden, and the Indians were just like dolls. In silence we crossed the square and turned into a street that ran downhill. Then I said : “You are not from Guatemala, are you ?” and to make the question less crude, I hurried into an account of my own journey which had begun several thousand miles farther south, on the banks of the Rio Plate and would end some time, I supposed, in the United States of America.

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"No," he replied, "I am a Mexican."

In answer to my cautious but insistent remarks, he said simply: "I came to make a pilgrimage."

"Yet you did not go into the church."

"No," said the man, his dark, smooth face expressionless, and his eyes gentle but remote. "I did not go into the church."

At the inn, which was very comfortable and unlike anything but a stage setting for a play about the Conquistadores and their Mayan princesses, I asked about the tall Mexican.

"I believe he works as a guide at some dude ranch over the Rio Grande, but he seems to know all these countries pretty well." The landlord, who was certainly half American, added: "If you want to ride into Yucatan, you could do worse than take him along. He seems to have a feeling for churches, so you could see about three thousand on your way north."

I thanked him and ate a delicious and improbable meal in a red and black room—or was it red and gold?—with Mayan gods and kings sitting in a stiff row round the court outside. I slept in a larger room hung with reed matting, and I washed in great earthen jars. Then I went in search of the Mexican and I found him seated on a bench in the square, where all the local inhabitants, human and canine, collected towards evening.

The market was over. Across the open space we could see the church with that effect of wings just lifting on the top of the tall white steps. After some difficult conversation, for the Mexican although gentle and polite was not inclined to talk, I repeated the hotel-keeper's suggestion. In flattering Spanish the man thanked me, but said he had only a few more days before he must return to the ranch at which for two or three years he had been employed. I asked how he had come so far south. He said: "By all

ways," but he had ridden the last few stages and now his horse was sick, so he would have to return by boat and lorry.

We talked about Chichicastenango and the Mexican called it 'The city of bright peace.' In the church, he explained, pilgrims from all over Central America laid their burdens of doubt and fear at the feet of Mary, the eternal Mother. They went to her like children and they came away with the strength and the courage of men. While he spoke I remembered that he had not gone into the church, and he answered my thoughts by saying with the grave dignity that seemed habitual to him : "There are, perhaps, some burdens which one may not lay aside."

Next day, at the innkeeper's request, he rode with me to the top of the range in search of the 'oldest god,' a stone image of pre-Mayan origin, standing above the pines on a summit wreathed in clouds.

It was very cold. We had to walk the last few miles because the ponies found the track too steep. The god had been decorated with fresh flowers, but rain and wind had almost obliterated his features. He was a great lump of stone without particular interest except that for centuries about which we know nothing, he had been worshipped by peoples whose history has been lost with their names.

"The Indians cannot quite forget," explained my companion. "They want to make sure of one heaven or another, so after they have made their prayers and their confessions in the church below, they climb up here and kill some animal—a panther if they can find one—to appease this image which their ancestors adored." He did not smile, but he looked as if he understood the pitiful expedients of humanity.

As we slithered down towards the first trees, I asked him if he had always been a guide.

"No," said he. "I was once a murderer."

Oddly enough, I was neither surprised nor horrified, for the man was so gentle and diffident. When he helped me on to my horse, he looked away as if he did not want to interfere in any way, or even to impinge on my thoughts. When I fell in a heap at a hopelessly slippery corner, he helped me to pick myself up, but it seemed that he touched me with reluctance. He preferred to walk a little apart, leading both horses, and he never spoke unless he was addressed.

"Whom did you murder?" I asked in a voice as quiet as his own.

It was late afternoon. The pine woods were black smears across the mountains. When we reached them we should be in twilight. The wind was strong and cold. Uproariously it swept over the bare slopes and I wished I had brought a coat. There were no houses in sight. We could not even see Chichicastenango which lay deep down between the ranges. Very gently, the Mexican said: "I killed an evil man." The answer seemed final. I did not dare to question it.

After a while, seeing me shiver in the gale, the man took off the woollen cloak which covered his shabby, tight-fitting clothes, and offered it to me. "No, thanks," I said. "You keep it. When we get to the woods it will be sheltered."

But he insisted: "Put it on," and there was authority in his voice.

While I walked ahead, warm in the thick folds of the cloak, I thought of my companion as two distinct people. He was just a guide, simple and efficient, with a good knowledge of horses and weather, a peasant probably not far removed from the earth on which I could imagine him sleeping wrapped in the cloak which smelled of oil, dung, horse-flesh, and tobacco, and from which his people had, no doubt, extracted a hard living. But he was also a person of quality

who had thought a great deal and had made up his own mind. As a guide and a peasant, he was gentle and provident, sufficiently brave no doubt and capable of dealing with any outdoor situation, but behind the gravity and the respect of his demeanour there was something burning like a flame. I did not know what fuel went to feed this blaze of bitter passion that set the man apart, but I thought that he had suffered or sinned too much. For him there would be no peace until he could strip himself of life as he had done of name and past and personal possessions. For, when I asked him where he had lived and what he was called, he said only: "I have no home, but at the ranch where I work they call me Diego."

The following morning before I left for Antigua, that ghostly city, lovely and deserted at the feet of the great volcanoes by whose violence it was wrecked, I asked the Mexican for the address of the American farm where I imagined he had found shelter as well as employment.

He gave it without demur and told me also that if I liked fishing, or hunting bear and deer on the fringe of the Rocky Mountains, I would find the place to my taste. I thanked him and he refused other payment for his services. "Give it to the church," he said, and swept off his big, black hat with a flourish that would have done credit to the bull-ring. It seemed that he mocked me because I could not distinguish between price and value.

Thoughtfully I took my small offering to the local priest and of him too I made cautious enquiries, but the Franciscan, busy with the problems of an enormous and half-pagan *paroisse*, could only say: "If he is a Mexican, he must have been a soldier in some army. They are always fighting and they have done great harm to the church." It was evident he regarded the neighbouring state as heathen, but he blessed my journey with a generous disregard for

the difference in our points of view. And eventually, having crossed the low forests of Yucatan with the Mayan palaces and temples rearing out of them like full-rigged ships at sea, I came to the Mexican plains with the domes of innumerable churches blown into coloured soap-bubbles. Farther north I went to El Paso, which is American in spite of its Spanish name, and there I asked how I might reach the ranch whose name Diego had given me. It was not a difficult road. I went some distance in a borrowed car. Then a lorry driver gave me a lift and on the fourth day, under a sky that was almost white, with a pale sun silvering the peaks, I arrived at an agreeable house built in Spanish fashion round a large courtyard.

It was January and already, in that fortunate valley, the end of winter. A few yellow flowers bloomed timidly beside the exiguous fountain. Jasmine budded on the adobe walls which were washed with pink. A wide porch ran round three sides of the house and jars nearly as high as a man stood between the pillars. The double doors leading into the court were of redwood, unstained and pitted with huge nails. It was all very picturesque. It was also comfortable and designed for tourists whose banking accounts never gave them a moment of discomfort.

The young couple who ran the place were typically American, in that he was square, lean, decided and unfinished, while she was exquisite, capable, superlatively washed and brushed and cultivated and informed, without being in the least original.

I liked them both and I enjoyed looking at Luce because her hair was so fair that one could hardly tell where the skin of her forehead ended and the pale curved strands began, and because her eyes were a gay, gallant blue to match her shirts. She had a firm chin and an orderly nature. She loved her husband and always spoke of him as 'Mr.

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Neilson,' which added stature to the pleasantly shabby and insistently healthy young man whose manners were a cross between those of a schoolmaster and a game-warden.

Oddly enough Diego fitted admirably into this New England atmosphere. He guided tourists in unsuitable clothing wherever he had induced them to imagine they wanted to go. He showed them how to fish in the stream which flung itself cheerfully across the valley and in the proper season he actually made them catch fish as well as the branches of trees and their own elegant sweaters. He took them up into the foothills to see bear and coyotes and no doubt had the time been ripe, he would have hypnotized the most ignorant into shooting whatever head or skin he coveted. But he had a rooted objection to killing anything himself. Once, when I trod on the utmost end of a snake, Diego whipped the creature away with a twist of the stick he carried, but he would not crush it.

"Isn't it dangerous?" I protested.

"No more than we are," retorted the Mexican, but he was not sententious. He would shoot for the pot if necessary. He would, the Americans assured me, kill any animal that threatened their precious tourists—if he could not otherwise dispose of it—but, they said, he had a 'kind nature and was friendly-like with wild creatures.'

That night there were no other visitors. The three of us sat alone round a magnificent open fire. The logs crackled. Sparks flew on to the skins which took the place of rugs. The pink walls glowed. Gourds of surprising colours were piled in clay bowls. Across the matting crept one or two horned beetles. I imagined the faint crackling of their scales and wondered what they would be like magnified to the size of rhinoceroses.

We had drunk coffee from which the caffeine had been abstracted. We had eaten home-made scones and jam and

pickles. The wireless was droning gently about some domestic subject. Into this innocuous, this mildly sterilized atmosphere, I introduced the subject of Diego and more especially of Diego's past. "How did he come here?" I asked. "And is it true that he committed a murder?" Then I remembered that the Mexican had not clearly specified for how many murders he had been responsible. It was too ludicrous, for Diego was good-natured to the point of tenderness. He was the most helpful creature and would willingly fetch water from the creek if something went wrong with 'the system' on which our lone spot of civilization depended, or plaster any portion of the house that cracked. He would doctor a sick Indian, or cook the most delectable tortillas. In fact, the only thing he would NOT do was to talk about his past, which he said in the simplest fashion was 'with God.'

When I once ventured to ask him if he could in this fashion justifiably refer to assassination, he replied as directly: "With God is all good and all evil. He is the Creator and the Judge."

Diego was certainly very puzzling and I waited with interest to hear what the young Americans would say about him. They had an unrivalled ability for reducing everything to a commonplace—and hygienic—origin. "He just came over the border," said Luce. "I guess he thought he would earn better money in this state."

I could not imagine any motive more foreign to what I knew of Diego's nature, so I waited for more with the same delightful feeling of incongruity that Alice must have felt when she talked to the Red Queen.

"I guess he's pulling our legs over this murder business, unless it was a General. Now I come to think of it, I remember hearing, some place, of a General who got his clean in the chest. Must have been a mistake, for most of these Mexicans use a knife in the back."

Earnestly Mr. Neilson, aged perhaps twenty-eight, explained to me the character of Diego, who might have been two thousand and eight, for he had that curious combination of honesty and guile which belongs to children and to those who have long forgotten the sum of their years.

Luce and her husband, interrupting and asking each other's pardon with amusing formality, explained that killing a general in Mexico really did not count. To begin with, there were so many of them and to continue they would not be generals unless they were pretty bad.

"But why does he talk about it?" I asked, with a vague feeling that murder should have consequences.

"He does not exactly talk about it," reproved the young American, whose mind measured and accepted the limited amount of material it required and rejected the rest. "He just happens to mention it once or twice so that there should be no misunderstandings." Shifting his spare, uniformly sand-coloured person in the long chair, he added: "Unless he is rigging us along, but I wouldn't say it was that, would you, honey?"

The moon-coloured Luce replied in a voice, faintly shocked, that she was sure Diego just wanted to be comfortable about his past and he was 'sure-lee' most reliable, the best guide they had ever had. He made no trouble and could be relied upon to look after college girls intent on romance, or hard-boiled matrons wanting scenic effects for each dollar spent.

This was not quite Luce's way of putting it, but she left no doubt as to Diego's reliability.

"How did he escape? I mean, isn't anyone ever tried in Mexico?" I asked after a pause.

Mr. Neilson said Diego had done his best to be hanged or shot or whatever they did south of the Rio Grande, but the authorities were too busy to bother about him. That year there had been a lot of revolution about—he spoke as

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if it were influenza—and the dead general had belonged to the wrong side. Nobody but Diego had troubled about his death and when the man found he could *not* get executed, he just came across the border and started to earn good money—not that he could keep it for he was 'kind o' set on seeing these church affairs way down in Central America.'

Mr. Neilson opined that Diego was religious, but that didn't do any harm.

"But what do you suppose he was before?" I asked.

"We don't know," said both Neilsons.

Shortly afterwards a tow-coloured young woman intent on local colour arrived at the ranch. She was fearfully strenuous and nobody could resist her. We all rode with her and listened to her, and occasionally we were even permitted to talk to her when we could remember any local legends. For this stalwart and engaging maiden, a graduate from some eastern college, was in her own words 'a whale for all this magic stuff.' She was also an excellent organizer and when the time came for her to depart, I found that she had planned for Diego and me to accompany her for several days across the mountains on horseback to a main line, where she would catch a superlatively rapid and convenient train.

"But why must I come?" I asked, for there was a good deal of snow on the hills and it sounded to me an uncomfortable expedition as well as a purposeless one so far as anybody but the uncompromising Sarah-Graham was concerned.

"I could not go alone with that Mexican," she replied firmly.

So, not thinking it worth while to point out that I should have to return alone with him, for that fact would not have disturbed the young woman or caused any modification of her plans, I eventually set out, dominated by the determination of a girl at least twelve years younger than myself.

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For four monotonous days we trafiled over the mountains. Pine woods engulfed us. We scrambled down the rocky beds of streams or climbed laboriously up them. We slipped sideways over smooth slopes, where the grass was studded with flowers. Occasionally we plunged into melting snow and I feared we should have to dig ourselves out, but nothing untoward happened. Diego proved invaluable. At night, in the forest cabins, he made us beds of pine branches and fires of dry, resinous wood. He cooked admirable and varied meals from the supplies we carried in capacious saddle-bags. He brought us water and even contrived that it should be hot. He looked after the horses and saw that they were properly girthed so that even on the steepest trails the saddles remained somewhere behind the withers. And when we could induce him to ride anywhere near us, he told us delicious and improbable tales of Indians who sought revenge on well-guarded enemies in the bodies of conveniently inconspicuous wild animals. By the end of the long ride we were prepared to believe that every mountain 'lion' contained the desperate and savage soul of a local inhabitant with a grievance. If we had met a bear, we should not really have been surprised if it had sat up and asked us for our money or our lives.

But without any such dramatic occurrence we arrived at the railway line and an excellent wooden hotel where the Neilsons, with admirable forethought, had already made a reservation for us. Unfortunately, they had not sufficiently defined the nature of the party, so there was only one room available.

Diego immediately said he would sleep on the verandah, or on a long chair in the hall. Sarah-Graham and I were left to contemplate the solitary wooden bed and to decide how we could best divide it. While we were still undecided, a west-bound train came in and poured a flood of school-

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teachers on to the hotel porch, which became, almost without pause, the platform.

In their wake faltered the incongruous little figure of a Salvation Army lass. She had made no reservation. I am not certain that she had not got out at the wrong station. When all the teachers had been neatly disposed among a wholly inadequate amount of beds, the waif in the blue bonnet was left forlorn in the hall. There she would have to stay until, between midnight and dawn, a slow train went into the Rockies. On this she would be able to find a seat, said the Manager without sincerity, and hurried away to important—and expected—clients.

Ruefully, Sarah-Graham and I took charge of the outcast who had been horrified at the suggestion that she should spend the first hours of the night (even fully clothed and bonneted and sitting erect on a wooden chair beside the bell-push and the door) within the same four walls as Diego. With grave courtesy the Mexican had offered her his saddle blankets and a pillow, but the girl had refused them as if they were Faust's jewels. So we took her into our room, gave her most of our bedding, and suggested she should sleep in the bath. To this she agreed, saying that when the early train was due she would creep away without disturbing us.

Amiably enough we all undressed. Over face cream, of which the Salvation Army girl disapproved, we exchanged a few confidences. Then our guest retired to the admirable porcelain tub. Sarah-Graham, who had a great many other names as well and refused to part these two, dragged the mattress on to the floor, establishing herself upon it with a coat rolled under her head for a pillow, and I was left to seek repose upon the denuded springs.

No doubt we were all tired. I know I slept as well as I have ever done, with my riding-boots wrapped in a bath

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towel for a pillow and a brilliantly striped saddle-cloth spread over whatever bedclothes had been allotted to me.

In the middle of the night I was wakened by an appalling sound. There was no need for Sarah-Graham's quavering: "What was that?" I knew at once that something terrible had happened or was going to happen. The sound was repeated. It came from the bathroom and it cannot adequately be described. With a shriek, comforting and ordinary by comparison, Sarah-Graham leaped from her mattress on the floor straight into the middle of the bed where I crouched, paralysed with fear. The springs were of the strongest and most resilient material. Reacting to the sudden impact of nine solid stone, they bounced and we bounced with them. For a moment, while we struggled to regain the comparative safety of the bed, the same thought filled both our minds, and Sarah-Graham voiced it.

"That wasn't a girl at all," she said in a voice of terror and awe. "It was an animal that looked like a woman!"

Fuddled with sleep and further confused by the darkness and the memory of Diego's stories, I agreed.

Another bout of noise came from the bathroom and I wanted to be sick. No human throat could make such sounds.

"Turn on the light," ordered Sarah-Graham.

"Why don't *you* do it?" I protested.

"I daren't."

Eventually one of us pressed the button and with our hearts sunk in our stomachs, where they were altogether too sentient and active, we crept across the room. The light reached into the cubicle built around the magnificent porcelain tub. With the courage of desperation, I pushed the communicating door flat back against the wall.

There was nothing alive in the bathroom. The bedclothes we had lent were neatly folded on a chair and from the

emptiness in front and around us came the worst noise we had yet heard.

I really felt a great deal of sympathy for Sarah-Graham when she subsided on to the floor with the plop of dough upset and had hysterics. She had them very thoroughly. I heard steps on the porch, then our door was flung open and Diego rushed in, fully clothed, cool, dark, and still intensely separate from all his surroundings.

"What occurs?" he said quickly, and his eyes swept round the empty room. When he was convinced of emptiness he paused like a wave rolled back on itself.

"Listen!" I said, quaking after the fashion of badly made jelly, and at that moment a sound as if the graves were giving up their reluctant dead came from within a few feet of us.

Without a word Diego stepped over the prostrate girl, stalked through the bathroom and pulled apart the curtains. Outside, just under the window-sill, sat an enormous porcupine, yowling full-throated to a friend who replied with equal venom from the nearest shadows.

Diego behaved admirably. He dropped a wet sponge on to one porcupine and threw my nail-brush at the other. He then picked up the blankets carefully folded by the Salvation Army lass before she had slipped away to catch her train, draped one round the still gasping Sarah-Graham and offered me the other. "I will make coffee," he said, and from the doorway: "It is the mating season. The poor ones were only singing of their love."

I thought perhaps he smiled. Then his long black figure disappeared and I was left to shake Sarah-Graham into some semblance of her natural self. When the coffee arrived, she ceased to gulp and sputter, but it took some time to convince her that the Salvation Army girl had not taken advantage of our bathroom to turn into one of the mythical animals so vividly described by Diego.

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Not till morning did she recover her assurance, but after we had rescued the nail-brush and the sponge, she remarked on the folly of throwing them into the mud. "You must have been very much afraid," she said.

Diego and I rode back across the mountains. Relieved of Sarah-Graham's emphatic presence, I was able to relax and at the same time to weave fantastic theories round the long, tense figure riding ahead. I had imagined that the ludicrous episode of the preceding night would have bridged the gap between us, but up to the moment of the American girl's departure Diego had been gravely comforting and solicitous. He had agreed that porcupines did make preposterous noises and that he ought to have warned us, yet always behind the quiet courtesy of the guide, there was an assurance which robbed me of speech. It held an authority I dared not question and it was too impersonal to be irritating.

A few yards behind Diego's chestnut mare, I could not keep my thoughts from the man who rode it as if he had grown on its back. There was so much I should have liked to know about him, but though he was always considerate and often guessed what I wanted before I asked for it, he talked more easily of the animals we might see and the trees blazed by the axes of forest guards than of anything to do with himself. He loved nature and the earth, but he did not love life. Deep in him there was always a quiet and unprotesting sorrow.

I had a glimpse of it the first night when we sat in a smoky cabin, beside a fire of green branches that refused to burn properly. We had eaten our meal and I was talking deliberately about Central America and the swift interplay of life and death in lands where a knife takes the place of speech. Diego suddenly interrupted to say: "It is so difficult to die."

I suppose I looked at him surprised, for he explained:

" You think it is difficult to live, but, for me, life will continue until I cannot any more bear it. I have tried to die. It is right that I should die, for I have killed. But it is not permitted to me. I must live."

His words were abrupt, but they did not sound dramatic, for he said them in a slow tired voice and all the lines in his face drooped. His long nose and the lips that were thin and well-shaped, the almond eyes, full and deep, brimming with a suggestion of liquid, hung heavily in the smooth oval face with a few hairs on the chin. I realized then that Diego was revealing more than he intended and I was uncomfortable. The complete desolation which enveloped him like the folds of a cloak seemed at once too poignant and too austere to be shared, so, in halting Spanish, I began to tell him about the Wandering Jew. I had seen the film or the play, I forget which, and I probably exaggerated the appeal of the man who could not die until the Christ whom he had mocked on the way to crucifixion should come for the second time to earth.

Half-way through the legend, I realized that Diego was listening with an intentness that held him rigid. His lips were parted. His white, strong teeth gleamed in the shining darkness of his face and the smoky gloom of the cabin. I found myself looking at the man's teeth while I completed the tale with the burning of the Jew as a heretic.

" So at last he was able to die," I said as lightly as I could, for Diego's eyes were filmed. I doubt if he saw the cabin at all. With a queer, inverted look, he sat beside the fire, occasionally arranging a branch, or sweeping together the hot ashes, while the whole of his body brooded over the thoughts he had never expressed. He asked a number of questions about the Jew's martyrdom and for a moment, in the sombre solitude of the cabin with the silence of the forest, frostbound, outside, I let my imagination run riot.

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I hoped that Diego would not try to emulate the fabulous Jew and then I forced myself to laugh, but it sounded unnatural in the small enclosed space, heavy with acquiescence. Diego looked up, surprised, and I realized the simplicity of his emotions and the superstition engendered by his mixture of Spanish and Indian blood. Yet I could not feel superior, for there was so much in the man that I did not understand.

For two more days we rode leisurely along the trails which climbed from valley to ridge, from cottonwoods and colourless sagebrush through armies of pines, dark and stiff, to the snowline, and down again to red oak scrub and aspens quivering into leaf and crane's-bill flowers pale among the greasewood. And during those long hours, sunlit or steeped in shadow, stiffening between the high pommel and cantle of the local saddle or relaxed beside a camp fire, I learned nothing more about Diego, but on the third night the Mexican was faced by a desperate situation.

We came suddenly upon the well-built solid cabin where we had slept on our way to the railway. It did not look tenanted. No smoke came from the chimney, but a lame horse, still bridled, with its saddle hanging and caked with mud from withers to fetlock, stood outside.

"There has been an accident," said Diego, and swung himself to the ground, throwing the reins over his mare's head. He went into the hut, while I sat for a moment looking up at the steep slopes, strewn with boulders. It was easy to see where the path had given way. Horse and rider must have come hurtling down with a cascade of loose stones. I wondered that either of them lived.

Inside the cabin there were two bunks made of pine trunks. The branches we had used as mattresses were still fresh and on them, heaped across one of the rough shelves as if he had dragged himself there with his last strength, lay a man who might have been Indian or Spaniard, prob-

in the embers. He fetched me blankets which I heaped round my shoulders in Indian fashion. He tended the lame horse and showed anxiety about his chestnut's off-fore. Then he asked whether I would sleep in the second bunk inside the hut or if he should make me a bed of branches outside. I could have the saddle rugs for extra coverings and he would keep up the fire all night.

"Make what arrangements you like," I said, "but of course we must both sleep. It is a long ride to-morrow."

For a moment Diego did not move. Absorbed in his simple thoughts, he sat with one crinkled boot in the ashes, and I said to him suddenly: "Will you tell me now why you killed the General?"

Perhaps I had expected a revelation in keeping with those momentous utterances in the cabin, but the Mexican looked gentle and on the verge of fear. He said: "He was very evil." Then with a reflection of the century-old assurance that I had seen him wear like an apostolic cloak, he said in his rough Spanish: "There was no other way. He had sinned against the spirit of man."

Before I could think, before I had time to be afraid, I persisted—under cover of the gentle darkness, with the fire and the complice stars for tapers: "But why could you not hand him over to the law? Were there no just judges in Mexico?"

"You do not understand," said Diego, and then in a different voice, "I could not betray the man, for I had heard his confession—but I could not, I dared not let him live."

With the agility of the mountain panthers he was on his feet. Apparently he had no difficulty in seeing in the deep shadows beyond range of our fire, for I heard him cutting branches. Neither then nor at any subsequent time did he tell me more. But that night while I slept in the great woollen cloak he would not allow me to refuse, I wondered about

the crime which to the young priest, still half a peasant, bred of the land and its deep relentless emotions, had seemed intolerable. I thought of Mexico and its habit of finishing argument with a bullet or a knife. I remembered the stories I had heard of political murders, banditry and the horrors inseparable from the local brand of revolution. At a lunch-party in the capital I had sat next to a grave and distinguished landowner who was called to the telephone after the second course. When he returned he continued his meal as if nothing had happened, but in answer to a query from our host he said: "The Government sent some professional agitators up to my estate and when the labourers would not listen to them there was a dispute. The Government men shot down several of my peons in cold blood and then one of the agitators was killed." He took another helping of salad and the conversation turned to other matters. The mere taking of life could not have shaken the young priest from the position enjoined on him. It must have been some terrible mutilation, not of the body, but of life itself. Imagination failed me. Perhaps, I thought, for each of us there is one sin unforgivable and expiable only by death.

That night among the pines, with a haze of stars hanging in the highest branches, is the end of Diego's story so far as I really know it. The sequel is fantastic and it has no certain climax.

We returned to the ranch and the Neilsons duly exclaimed over the 'misfortune' of the half-caste. They sent word to the nearest forest guards and the man's body received Catholic burial. I did not tell what had happened in the hut, but, perhaps because the strange scene remained always at the back of my mind, we talked in the days that followed about religion and its attendant superstitions.

Luce and her square-boned, narrow-minded young husband were New England protestants, but their disapproval

of other sects did not prevent them from a cultural appreciation of what they no doubt considered to be psychological aberrations. So, in due time, they mentioned the Penitentes with a curious suggestion of shame, for such fantasies should not, they felt, occur within the borders of civic, scientific, and eugenic America. If I had heard nothing but their account I should have grasped little about these strange and merciless people, worshippers of death, whose emblem is a skull, but fortunately—or perhaps most unfortunately—a Professor from Boston came to the ranch to recover from the effects of concentrated study. He knew more of the ancient practices now forbidden by law, but, while able to discuss at length the origin of the creed which he attributed to reaction against the brutalities of Aztec rule, he could not tell me how effectively it had been eliminated.

The Penitentes were Christians, he said, perhaps the earliest known among the mountains of the original Mexico. They believed in torture of the body for the benefit of the spirit. On Good Fridays they still held processions in remote places, but it was very difficult to see them and indeed there was nothing much to see nowadays, for the law had reduced what was once a voluntary human sacrifice to a ritual shabbily symbolic. Before their strongholds were breached by civilization in the form of roads and police, the Penitentes, who were largely of Spanish and Indian blood, used to crucify each year within their windowless churches or meeting-houses a youth chosen from many volunteers to represent for a few proud hours the Saviour of humanity and like Him to make atonement for the sins of the whole congregation.

A few of the blind walled temples still remained, said the Professor, and at midnight on Good Fridays groups of men clothed in white, with whips or staves in their hands, would go up through the wild hill country, imitating the lamentations of their predecessors, but, insisted the erudite citizen

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of Boston who was sympathetic as well as intelligent, there were no more sacrifices. He acknowledged that an image might possibly take the place of the youthful Penitente determined on a short and certain road to heaven, but the cult was dying out.

From an Indian I learned more, and because Easter was approaching, I confided in Diego. He must, at all costs, discover where I could see a procession of the Penitentes. After that I used to see the Mexican in deep conversation with the Indian who had wandered north from Chihuahua, and who was said to know all about the secret valleys where the Chilchuis are supposed still to follow the Aztec rites, sacrificing to the sun on the shortest day of the year, so that their crops may grow and their cattle have twin calves. He was a remarkable old man with his stream of black hair loosely plaited, his striped blanket, and a hat of coarse straw wreathed with wild flowers.

At first he would say little, but Diego with his receptive patience drew from him at last the assertion that 'over the border,' in the high mountains where there were still many different gods, the people of one village, very poor and ignorant, but untouched by the devitalizing processes of civilization, adhered to the ancient ritual of the Penitentes, except, said the old man, that there was not always a corpse. His eyes narrowed and grew furtive as he repeated the last words.

Diego told me afterwards that in this particular village, on Easter Sunday, every man walked abroad with a splash of crimson on his clean, white clothes. According to the Indian it was paint, but once, long ago, it had been blood, and everybody in that valley knew that prosperity had disappeared with the old courageous faith. It would not return until some youth offered himself in place of the beast that yearly died within the windowless house in memory of long-

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ago sacrifices, when the Penitentes took upon themselves the burden of the world's guilt.

Naturally, as soon as I heard of this village, I determined to go there in time to see as much as possible of the Good Friday festival. The Neilsons confessed to other tourists who had gone here and there in New Mexico and spent uncomfortable nights making themselves as inconspicuous as possible behind the angles of mud walls or even lying on their unaccustomed middles wherever shadow might hide them, and had been rewarded by the sight of white-robed peasants, of very mixed blood, dirty, half drunk, and generally quarrelsome, ineffectively flogging themselves into what the watchers described as second-rate ecstasy. They made no objection to my following the habitual practice of those in search of local colour. Diego was reliable. He had shepherded other parties in too thin shoes or altogether too much length of boot bought in the local store, and he knew exactly when and where caution must be exercised.

But Diego had not previously heard of the village with the unpronounceable name hidden among the folded hills in his own land, and we did not definitely state our destination when we set out together in a smart Ford truck with the blessing of the Neilsons, who thought it reasonable that guests should want to 'go places' and see all the quaint things that 'maybe' did happen among the half-whites and half-Christians, not to mention the Yaquis and the Navajo, or those 'cute' Chilchuis, said to be the descendants of Montezuma and the Totonac chiefs.

"You'll see nothing but moonshine," opined Mr. Neilson, and Luce, so delicately fair, with the faintest crease between her pale uplifted brows, hoped we should not see anything 'just horrid' but I must remember anyway it was 'just fake' and the poor people in the mountains were mostly Indian and had not any sense at all.

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So encouraged, we drove for a considerable number of days down the engaging green valley, with the plumpy cotton-woods bursting into full foliage, across a desert tufted with cactus, by torrents of stones and thin Indian pasture—thus into Mexico which, when you can get far enough away from the new hotels, the bars, the generals, the taste of sand, the smell of bull-rings, the completely useless killing and the indignant melancholy of political conversations, is an exquisite and vindictive land capable of anything and denying only the existence of the word impossible.

We slept in pink and yellow and cream-coloured adobe houses, with creepers breaking into vast and violent flowers. We ate things steeped in oil, or fried in rancid butter, coated with red pepper or flagrant with garlic. We were in turn eaten by a great variety of insects and when we had to leave the car in a grim, half-deserted little mud town, reeking with petrol and dead dogs, for it was on the main road to some mines, I felt like a veteran of many battles. Scarred and burned, for wind and sun were as destructive as the insect plagues, I mounted the horse that Diego had procured for me and was annoyed because his looked considerably stronger. My irritation vanished when the animal in question put its head down, squealed furiously and tried to turn a succession of somersaults. Its rider remained unmoved and the horse looked foolish. When an attempt at murder and suicide combined had been foiled on the edge of a precipice gleaming like striped silk, the stallion gave up the unequal contest.

Diego, understanding the situation, rode with loose reins and I followed, generally afraid to look down, but fascinated by the candy effect of the rocks.

The village, when we reached it, after sleeping one night in the open, was much less impressive. It consisted of a straggling mess of small flat houses. In the centre there

was the usual irregular square and nowhere any sign of a mysterious building without windows or obvious entrance. We arrived on the Monday before Good Friday and lodged in an unclean inn where I recognized nothing that I ate, but, as the water was the colour of carrots, I drank, most unwillingly, a liquid of pleasing taste and disastrous effect, which combined apparently the qualities of most intoxicants and not a few emetics. Exhausted by the results of this preposterous beverage, I was unable to accompany Diego in quest of information.

Doubtless he thus acquired a good deal more than he repeated to me, but the villagers, though quite friendly, for prospectors and miners and an occasional scientist sometimes strayed into the pinkish and peeling inn, shambling round a thicket of shrubs with raw red and purple blooms, were apparently monosyllabic. I suppose they could and did talk, but I never heard them make more than one sound at a time and that generally tonal.

Diego presumably understood them, for he said they were pitiful and simple people, so poor that there would soon be none of them left and incapable of making any effort to improve their situation because they believed themselves bereft of fortune with the ceremonies which had once ensured their prosperity. "For," continued Diego, "I think the Indian did not tell all the truth. There is no great festival to watch and the house without windows is far up in the hills. We must start on Thursday night and even then there will, perhaps, be nothing for you to see." He spoke with his usual grave simplicity. He was, as always, solicitous for my comfort, but he seemed to be far away. Between us there was more than the gulf of race, tongue, and belief, for the Mexican acted always by instinct. He had no powers of reasoning. I used to feel sometimes as if I were in the middle of a nightmare in which I shrieked myself hoarse in

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order to attract the attention of somebody close beside me, yet no sound came from my lips.

Gentle, quiet, and utterly resigned, Diego looked after the horses and me. He climbed high up the range to procure water of a normal taste and colour. Once he gave me a red flower without any explanation at all. Occasionally I saw him speaking with the dark, half-Indian youths, or with the older men who leaned upon their own backbones and the memory of their years in attitudes of negligent grace, but otherwise did nothing. And at last, when I was thoroughly bored, Thursday evening arrived. Diego said I had better rest after a peculiar six-o'clock meal, at which the only familiar dish had been a gaunt chicken cooked in American fashion by my guide. At eight o'clock he said we would start, but we would have to go on foot, which sounded to me as unpleasant a method of spending the night as those adopted by the other tourists who had not come nearly so far to see what I began to suspect did not exist.

It was, I thought, impossible to sleep upon the hard string bed covered with red quilts that harboured bugs inured to altitude and climate, but I slept so well that I awoke stupefied, remembering little of what I intended to do and not at all surprised by darkness that could not possibly belong to eight o'clock on a spring evening. While I wondered vaguely why Diego had not come for me, I fell asleep again.

The sun was comparatively high when the innkeeper's wife pushed open the clumsy wooden door that opened on to the yard and brought me a nauseous beverage which she called coffee.

Furious, I asked for Diego. I shouted his name across the square which was not only silent, but deserted. He did not answer, nor did the women, who alone remained in the inn, explain where he had gone.

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On the rough table which, with a stool, completed the furniture of my room, I found the money I had given him to pay for the horses and our few provisions. There was no message with it. So far as I was concerned Diego had ceased to exist.

For two days I waited in the crumbling mud village, asking questions of women who seemed to be dumb. I ate the strong-smelling food that was brought to me, and walked as far as I could into the surrounding mountains, but the trails were difficult to follow and I could not induce the most active girl to come with me. In silence and an amiable lack of understanding, the whole female population had taken refuge. They asked nothing and they told me nothing.

On Saturday night the village was empty. A dead dog lay in the middle of the square and some vile black birds flapped round it.

On the morning of Easter Sunday the space between the houses was crowded with men wearing every variety of white garment. I saw curiously shaped trousers and shorts, shirts worn inside and out, robes like voluminous nightgowns, shawls, blankets, and Indian serapes, as well as a peculiar kind of tunic or overall ending above the knees.

There were far more men than I had ever seen in the village before and each of them had a splash of red above his heart.

As usual the woman of the inn brought me coffee. While I drank it on the inner porch with the walls peeling around me and a few great, heavy-headed flowers flaunting out of the mud, I explained the absence of Diego by telling myself that, at the last minute, he had decided it would be dangerous for me to follow the host of half-pagan Penitentes, savage, perhaps, when their suspicions were aroused. But he had not been able to resist the urge of his own mournful nature which might at any moment find motive and meaning in

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the worship of death through self-inflicted torture. At that moment I understood the helpless and occasionally hostile mysticism at the root of Diego's character, but I assured myself that he would return, that at any minute he would come striding over the cracked earthen floor with his two separate expressions one behind the other. First I would see the blank and gentle obstinacy of his guide's face, the long features rendered heavy and ineffective by the terrible, even terrifying resignation of the half-breed. But behind this would be the relentless assurance of the man who had been both priest and murderer.

But Diego did not come. I had known all the time that he would not come.

Instead a dark youth approached me with his eyes fixed on the ground. The horses were ready, he said. In a dozen words he forced me to understand that he would guide me back through the passes and within sight of the town where the car waited; when I had only to follow the path downwards, he would leave me.

To my insistent questions he made no answer. Like the women, he might have been deaf and dumb but for the phrases which I imagined had been dictated to him. On the breast of his flaring shirt there was a reddish-brown stain. Whenever I looked at it I felt sick. Yet I had no real reason to believe it other than paint.

When I recounted my experiences to the Neilsons they said at once and with certainty that it must have been paint. The Professor from Boston made only one comment. It sounded like the scientific—or perhaps just the modern—equivalent of Shakespeare's 'There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy.'

Men as Gods

BETWEEN POLAND AND VIENNA

IN every part of the world I have heard stories of real people—men and women who looked just like anybody else but who, owing to the pressure of unusual circumstances, had done things so extraordinary that they were hardly credible. Sometimes the stories told me in ports and mining-camps, under tents in the desert, in back streets and bazaars, or under the temporary roofs of patriots and outlaws, saints, sinners and dictators, had definite endings. More often they had none at all. Because of the surroundings in which I heard these tales, I believed them, but there was one story told me by a man I had known for years, while we ate an admirably cooked dinner in Vienna's best-known restaurant, that I could not believe. Yet now I think it was true.

The man in question was a Pole. I used to be able both to pronounce and to spell his six-syllabled surname, but now I think of him as Jurek, which was what we all called him in those irresponsible years immediately after the war. London—or in any case the London we knew—was then at the height of its youthful abandon. Never again would it be so warm-hearted, so recklessly sincere and so convinced that life had been renewed and given back to us all freshly laundered, with every crease ironed out of it ! You see, we really did think the last war had been fought. Carnage was at an end and a 'brave, new world' in the making.

At twenty, at nineteen, and even younger we had evaded British regulations and gone overseas to drive flying ambulances at the front. We had not enjoyed it, for the ambulances of the Société de Secours aux Blessés Militaires had no windscreens or self-starters. In frozen winters we had strained our backs over the handles of the heavy 40 h.p. Mercédès, and for thirteen and sixteen hours a day we had driven them through snow, hail and fog, drenched in spite of our army great-coats, without lights and without any certainty of bed or food if the Germans chose to start shelling and an advance post had to be cleared.

So when we came back to England, we felt we ought to celebrate the end of a destructive era. We had lost the years through which girls dance to-day, but we did not care because, stored up within us, were unlimited high spirits and a power of enjoyment that has since disappeared.

We have become sober as a result of our repeated failures, but in those months nobody had a sense of responsibility. The very word 'war' was to be obliterated from the dictionary.

It amuses me to-day to hear lovely ladies discussing the imminent production of their daughters and to remember what they themselves were doing eighteen years ago. I remember a certain dance that finished with the dawn, although it had not been intended to happen at all, but somebody had brought a gramophone in a wheelbarrow and somebody else had burgled a relative's house for beer. When we all came out into an august square, there were no taxis, but a slim blonde creature who is now a duchess commandeered a milk wagon. The driver was bundled into an area with a foreign attaché's cloak tied over his head. Into the wagon we piled, and then somebody said: "Who'll drive?"

It was Jurek who replied: "Me, of course, but I need four horses," and he clambered on to the box and with

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strange, endearing noises urged the surprised cobs into a gallop.

I was the last to be dropped, with the three daughters of an ambassadress, and we could get no answer from the tall, thin house to which we had as usual lost the latch-key. So we slept in the milk van until a policeman intervened, upon which Jurek, speaking a violent and an unknown tongue, produced portentous documents authorizing him, I believe, to buy cars for his Government, but the seals alone were too much for the policeman.

Thereafter, Jurek became one of the family. I cannot remember what we did in the daytime, but we seem to have spent the nights bathing in inconvenient lakes, breakfasting under flares at coffee-stalls in country towns and motoring—always motoring at breakneck speed—in the large open cars which Jurek or his friend, an enormous fair Polish baron, were trying on behalf of their unsuspicious Government.

We realized that we, no more than the Ministry which had sent him to England, could depend on the vast, dark man who looked, and very often behaved, like a bear, but we found him irresistible. He was always hours late and he was apt to arrive at last attired in a bilious tweed combining the worst tones of spinach and mustard, but with such deliciously inconsequent excuses that we only laughed at his clothes. We must have been utterly devoid of self-consciousness, or else very arrogant, for six feet seven of Jurek in yellowish-green should have been enough to startle even tolerant post-war London, but apparently we did not mind.

We could not go anywhere, or do anything, without the Pole. For three days he and I even became engaged, to the despair of all our friends and indeed to our own.

We knew nothing about Jurek. He told us fabulous stories. "My grandfather was a great sportsman," he said.

"He would hunt anything, even Jews, and when he caught them he would hang them one on each tree down the avenue. But there were not enough trees, so he planted more and more——" Jurek spread out his great arms, and his coat with the padded shoulders hunched itself about his ears. His soft, brownish-red, india-rubber lips smiled and his dark eyes looked fiercely mournful.

"What happened to your grandfather?" we asked.

"The peasants did not like him, so, one day—in summer—they buried him up to his neck in the earth, with a glass of water just out of reach, and the flies did the rest."

"Is that really true?" we asked, and Jurek shrugged himself into a bundle with his chin thrust forward, and said:

"I lof you all so much and you do not believe me. But what I have told you is nothing. You do not know Poland as it was under the Russian tyranny. Why, my grandfather was condemned to Siberia because he had attended one meeting of the nationalists—a secret meeting, of course, but there was always a traitor—and my grandmother drove in a sleigh in midwinter from Warsaw to Moscow to beg his pardon from the Tsar, but she was struck with snow-blindness on the way." His voice sank into intolerable gloom and it seemed to me that he enjoyed it. Even when he was happiest sorrow waited at his elbow, for centuries of tragedy and oppression had left their mark on his race. Jurek enjoyed his own despair and was always conscious of it. "You with your silly little safe and comfortable lives do not know what it is to suffer," he affirmed, oblivious of the preceding four years. "With us, a girl might dance all night in a palace and die in the morning because she knew too much. A father might kill his daughter to save her from Siberia. There was always the Russian party with its sons as hostages in the Imperial Corps de Pages and the nationalists working underground. Ah, the things I could tell you!"

"We shouldn't believe them," said the second daughter of the ambassadress, who was my particular friend, and to me : "Sita, you can *not* marry him."

"Why not?" said Jurek, without rancour. "She will, of course, be very miserable, when she is not even more happy, but that is the only way of living."

I took Jurek to stay with my family in Lincolnshire. They were appalled and too polite to show it. The man rode like a centaur, but without the slightest consideration for his horse. He shot superbly, but unfortunately he shot anything within sight. In August he was sent out—still in his sensational suit—with a shocked gamekeeper to pot a few rabbits. He returned with a handful of infantile pheasants, which had certainly not left the ground. The keeper was almost in tears, and even the Labrador looked ashamed.

When, breathless and disturbed, I suggested that we were most unsuited to each other, Jurek said in a rich, complacent voice : "Darling little vegetable, I thought you would like to marry me, but if it is not so, we will jost be more friends and do lots more *fon*." He always turned his U's into O's and we found the mispronunciation engaging, but doubtless at this particular moment I was chagrined by Jurek's indifference. When I protested he said : "Of course, I *lof* you and I *lof* Poland. I *lof* many things, but I cannot keep them." Impregnated by sorrows of whose origin he was ignorant, he descended into that Stygian gloom where none of us could reach him, but within half an hour he was leaning out of the window—for this last conversation took place in a train—trying to toss bulls'-eyes through the window of the next compartment, in which the rest of the party, exhausted, had taken refuge.

For years, Jurek and I remained friends, although we saw little of each other, for I married and wandered all over the world, and he went back to Poland to rebuild one of his

'sixteen houses that had been burned in the war' and to regret that pogroms had become unfashionable. "The Jews have all my money," he said, "and I cannot even have two of their heads for my gateposts."

We disbelieved in the sixteen houses and sympathized with the Jews.

"It's true they did a little bullying," said the ambassadress's daughter, who had just married a Rumanian of lineage so ancient as to be practically primeval, and was feeling tolerant in a spacious cosmopolitan fashion.

August repeated itself, as it has a habit of doing, and I forgot about Jurek except as an enormous dark bear of a creature, good-natured and sorrowful, who could not really be taken seriously. Then, one summer, I was delayed in Vienna, chiefly by laziness, while my husband visited Commissions and inspected armies pruned by the scissors of Versailles. At first I wandered in search of new cafés with the tourist's idea that one is not getting the most out of a foreign town unless one eats in different surroundings each night. Ignorantly I strayed into the long room of Otto Sacher, with the antlers and the hunting pictures hung on the panelled walls, and in the atmosphere of sombre discretion which belongs to a past wherein the burghers and the tradesmen, who now eat and drink with guttural satisfaction, played no part. Fat mothers and fathers of families, a King's Messenger, a secretary or two from the diminished legations and a few—a very few—travellers from Central Europe were established upon the hard leather seats reading newspapers, smoking, or gazing blankly into space.

Alone under a candle-bracket sat a woman who had neither apéritif, paper nor diplomatic eyeglass. Her black hair was tailored like a man's, her face so dark that it could not be compared to the duskiness of olives. More nearly it resembled the swart bronze of islanders who live between reef

and shore, yet she was obviously a European. Her mouth glowed deeply and warmly red. So did the scarf she had twisted round her neck, but the rest of her was as grim as Otto Sacher's thoughts about the past. During the pause between each course, which is part of the inevitable ritual, I stared at the unconscious diner. Detached and remote, unconscious I imagine of her surroundings, her deep, heavy-lidded eyes gazed at nothing, while their owner looked as if she had never cared for anything in her life. Immobile behind the smoke of her cigarettes, which she lit neatly one from another and smoked through an inconspicuous holder, she stared straight through life and found it trivial.

“Who is the lady opposite?” I asked my waiter, after he had explained the menu.

“She who dresses like a man? I do not know, but she is a good client. She comes here every night and the patron attends to her himself.” The man put all his verbs at the end of the sentences, and it took me a few seconds to disentangle his meaning.

During the following week I dined several times in Sacher's panelled room, and I used to engage the table opposite the woman who always wore the same black suit and the scarf redder than red ink, hoping perhaps that she would notice me and say something to me as she went out. But she never did.

Her dinner must have been ordered in advance, for as soon as she approached, moving quietly and inconspicuously between the other tables, the head waiter appeared with the first course, which, if it were fish, he dissected with the awe of a high priest solemnizing his first sacrifice. The woman never looked at him. I imagined her eyes under their shadowed lids too tired to look at anyone. She ate leisurely and lingered over her golden Tokay, appreciating, I thought, its colour as well as its flavour, and laying aside for the

moment her eternal cigarettes. Then she would go away as quietly as she had come, her assurance proof against the stares which followed her smoking-jacket.

One evening I invited a successful decorator to dine with me at Sacher's. Armoured with the newest glass bracelets and a decision that had never failed, my guest attempted to expedite the meal, found herself thwarted by the traditions of the place, glanced round in search of occupation for her avid mind, and concentrated on our *vis-à-vis*. "That woman need never be afraid of getting old," she remarked after an appraisal of every feature.

I was surprised, for I had not thought of the unknown diner as old or young. In brain and body she must certainly be mature, but the years could make no further mark on her. I had the fantastic idea that she was just waiting for them to pass. "Perhaps she is old already," I said. "Her eyes are tired enough," but I found I could not satisfactorily describe them.

"If I were a man," said my companion, who lived on and with her nerves so that they were a perpetual nuisance to herself and to everybody else, "I should like to be her lover—not for long, perhaps, but for a short while certainly."

Unreasonably annoyed, I changed the conversation.

The following day, as I walked along the Opera Strasse wondering if I dared pass the shop which sells the most fascinating enamels, boxes, bottles and cases, at prices which soared with the exchange, or whether I should be too much tempted to buy, I was hailed by a deep, rich voice that sounded full of burrs. It belonged to Jurek, and fortunately his suit, which hung away from him as if it contained much extraneous matter, was suitably dark. When we had exhausted our expressions of delight and had told each other from where we came and where eventually we were going, we agreed to dine together. "It is necessary," said Jurek. "I have

so much to say," and he beamed all over his india-rubber face, which was olive-skinned but bloodless, so that he always looked emotional, and his eyes gleamed with childish satisfaction. He liked talking and I had been a good listener.

"Of course it is necessary," I repeated. "I want to know what fantastic things you've been doing and who you are 'in lof' with now."

"You, of course," said Jurek, with delighted insincerity and the expression of a cat gorged on the best cream.

Then we both said: "At Otto Sacher's—yes?"

We sat in a corner under five candles, and although one did not then put on evening dress for the benefit of the panelled room hung with trophies of forgotten hunts, I wanted to impress Jurek, so I wore black chiffon. Its bewildering discretion would, I thought, amuse and perhaps intrigue the Pole. It did. We argued a good deal over what we should eat, and while we waited for it, Jurek laughed at me because I was so happily married, mocked me because I could not believe anything unconnected with horses—that was his way of expressing it—and loved me a little with his forlorn black eyes which, like the Bourbons, learned nothing and forgot nothing. But his speech was unusually restrained. He had been living on a property whose description sounded dismal, replanting trees and trying to grow whatever would find a market. He revelled, I thought, in the difficulties with which Polish landowners were faced. He was doubtful, oppressed, and at moments exaggeratedly gay. In fact he had not changed, except that he no longer said at once, without consideration, all that he thought or imagined that he thought.

"Have you ever had a secret?" I asked, partly to amuse him and partly because at that moment the woman with the red scarf had come into the room.

"Never!" exclaimed Jurek and, with the broadening of

vowels which made his speech so expressive, but which is tedious to read, so I omit it, he added : " My past is as blameless as an undertaker's wedding-cake."

" What a good thing ! " I laughed. " I've always been dreadfully afraid you would some day have a secret, and then, of course, you would die of indigestion."

" Would it matter ? " asked Jurek, with the interest he always gave to the matter and manner of his death. I saw he was going to relapse into gloom, from which none of us had ever been able to rescue him, for it was composed of the age-old tyrannies and repressions that crowded his subconscious mind, so I pointed out the woman in black and red. Her face was blank, but her eyes burned deep into her head. Her brows, straight and heavy, were drawn together, so that lines ran between them, yet she was not frowning.

" Who is she ? " I asked. " Do you know her ? "

" Nobody knows her, " said Jurek. " She is *de passage*. At least, so they say, but she reminds me of someone." He looked uncomfortable and his face shut itself up like a box, but he repeated : " I think, I am almost sure, she reminds me of someone."

" So you have a secret, " I insisted, but Jurek twisted his feet under his chair and put his elbows on the table, hunching his great shoulders and sinking his head between them, while he said that the Sôle Dieppoise could not have been better at Château Basque. I couldn't remember where Château Basque was, but I agreed, and hoped that my make-up was sufficiently thick to cover my annoyance. We talked about dictators. It was while I was giving what I supposed to be a brilliant and comprehensive summary of Mussolini's character, based on the fact that he had once told me his greatest ambition in life was to ' live alone,' that I realized we had attracted the attention of the woman with the scarf.

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I saw that she watched us. She looked neither interested nor surprised, but she was evidently on her guard.

"This pigeon is too perfectly cooked to be a bird at all," reflected Jurek. "It is a poem, a dream, one of those emotions that you will never savour, my little dear one." My companion's moments of affection were invariably translated into kitchen garden terms, but this may be habitual in Polish. After all, in French, when dearly loved, one becomes a cabbage or a radish and in American a sugar-bun or honey or anything else in the nature of candy.

At that moment I did not particularly notice what he said, for, reluctantly, my eyes met those of the woman about whom everyone expressed such decided ignorance. I imagined that they held me, weighed me, discarded me as unimportant, and passed on to my companion, who was brooding over his plate with the air of a child hoping for miracles. But still I watched the smooth, dark woman, and I saw in her face the birth of an expression. For the first time I realized that she must have been beautiful. Hidden beneath the mask which she had made of features and expression there was still beauty.

My silence made Jurek look at me. Then he turned so that he too could see the woman, and for a long time they gazed at each other. There was no recognizable expression on either of the Slavonic faces, but that they knew each other I could not doubt. After a while the head waiter obscured whatever vision they shared. With back bent and that peculiar submissiveness which *maîtres d'hôtel* infuse into their manner towards the great or the famous, he operated on a bird. Jurek returned to me as if from a great distance. His eyes were filmed. He sighed and said: "I believe I have a secret." His thoughts were evidently flowing backwards and with something of a shock I realized that he was middle-aged. Leaning back with his hands upon the edge

of the table, as if he would thrust it from him, he added : “ But I do not know what it is.”

“ That doesn’t make sense,” I said.

We refused the sweet which we had ordered and coffee came unexpectedly quickly. “ Ah, yes,” said Jurek, “ you must have sense, mustn’t you, always that tedious sense, but in Poland before the war there was no sense. There was courage and cruelty, a terrible heroism, madness if you like — ” He broke off, helpless in the flood of his memories.

“ I think, after all, I shall tell you the story,” he continued, and lit a cigarette which he subsequently allowed to burn his fingers. “ We are both of us wanderers. You also must have seen strange things, far stranger than those you write about.” With a mechanical gesture, he offered me his cigarette-case, but forgot to give me a match. I supposed that he found it difficult to begin. He sought for the right words and could not find them. Then he smiled, with unusual and rather pathetic diffidence, and said : “ Nothing that you have seen or heard can be as—er—strange—as what I am going to tell you.” Again he hesitated, while with strong, blunt fingers he made patterns in the ash-tray.

“ I suppose in the last twenty years I have seen most of the world, but I was brought up in Poland. Many of my family were martyred for Poland. I ought to have been a whole-hearted Nationalist, but I was attracted by the strength and the ease of Russia. Petersburg seemed to me the very heart of adventure. Imagine the glamour of the Tsar’s capital, plots, intrigues, frozen seas with torches flaring on them, midnight and sleighs galloping into the moonlight, secret arrests, the fortress of Peter and Paul, Siberia ! That is how I thought of Russia. There was too much drama, of course, but we had a good deal of that in Warsaw.” Jurek’s thoughts were evidently even more chaotic than his words. He said slowly : “ Among my friends were some who had

sickened of secret plotting. They were for Russia and a measure of material security, but there were others, many others, who lived for and dreamed of a free Poland. Families were divided by their politics. Nobody dared to speak freely." Silence, and then Jurek's voice, dragging the words out of his stomach : " I felt the futility of it all. My family had given too much. We had been imprisoned and slaughtered. It could not go on."

I recognized the frustration in his voice—and also the regret. " What you have missed, Sita, never to have seen pre-war Russia, of which Poland was a tragic and a splendid part ! There will never be anything like that again. Warsaw now is a European town, but ten and fifteen years ago it was neither East nor West, grim, fearful, magnificent—impossible, I suppose you would say. There was such poverty and such stupendous wealth, the Jews shut up in the ghetto, prisoners freezing underground and the land-owners driving their coaches straight into their castle halls ! " Jurek smiled at me as if he wanted me to believe. Then, in simpler words and a different tone of voice, he said : " In Warsaw, I used to stay with cousins in a very big house. Yes, it was so large, as large as your King's palace, and splendid, but also shabby. My cousin's wife was a Russian, but she took no part in politics. She entertained Tsarists, Nationalists, Republicans and the pro-German party, all of whom contributed to the volcanic feeling which made Warsaw unlike any other capital I knew, but perhaps Belgrade and Sofia were just the same, for Slavs take to intrigue like a cat to cream. It was a game for most of my compatriots, but the young played it too seriously. Forbidden fruit may be sweet, but the penalty for taking it was death.

" You remember, do you, how Poland was divided between Russia, Germany, and Austria, so the Nationalists had to work in the dark—or the dusk, I shall say, for something

was always known. Behind these young people who often talked too much, there was a powerful political combination, backed by international financiers who supposed that they would grow rich on the refuse of revolution." Jurek's hands clenched and he did not notice the cigarette burning his skin. His cheeks and eyes were suffused with the same dark glow. In everything but body he was very far away. "Russia sent a mission to Warsaw. Nominally it was a trade affair, but everyone knew what would be the result. Warsaw harboured a sufficiency of spies and traitors. They were well paid and if they did not know enough, they could always invent. Before the Mission left, it would be supplied with a list of names and the owners of those names would disappear.

" You can imagine the anxiety and the excitement, for the Nationalists did not know how or when the first blow would fall. Desperately, they wanted information and they could not get it, for the Russian Mission lodged with a Count X —no, I am not going to tell you his name—who had been brought up in the Corps de Pages at the Petersburg court. He was loyal, but one of his daughters was engaged to an officer of Nationalist sympathies. The other—well, it is the other of whom I am trying to tell you."

The tradesmen and the secretaries of Legation had finished their dinners. The restaurant was nearly empty. I watched a fat mother and two daughters, all dressed as widows, move clumsily towards the door. Embarrassed by their weight and unlimited crape, they bumped against the tables and made diffident apologies to the few diners who remained. "Tell me, then," I said at last, when Jurek seemed unable to break the silence.

" It is so difficult," he retorted in a dull voice, without any of the usual inflections, " because the story has no end. And also it is—as you will say—incredible." He crushed the last fragments of his cigarette and took another out of

his case at which we used to laugh because it was so large and covered with many coats of arms. "We were a little in love. With me, perhaps it was the atmosphere, you understand. Sudden death and sudden love were natural in Warsaw. One day, a Count or a Baron would attend an official reception covered with orders, and the next, half naked, he would be on his way to Siberia. No, I do not exaggerate. It was so. Olga, whom I loved, perhaps more than a little, was terribly, tragically in earnest. The man she most admired, a patriot and a great scientist, had been cut into small pieces by Cossacks of the Guard, because he would not acknowledge the divinity of the Tsar. I remember Olga saying, 'They can murder a Pole, or ten thousand Poles, but they cannot murder Poland !' And there was her father, pledged to Russia, with the Mission under his roof !" Jurek began to speak quicker. He wanted to come to the end. "My cousins gave a ball and it was supposed the Russians would attend, but at the last minute they sent excuses. Olga and her sister came across from the gaunt old palace which occupied the other side of the square. They were twins, did I tell you, and so alike, both dark and small, with skins like that white stuff you cannot wear unless you put on a lot of rouge. That night they wore white, the same dresses, and they looked like ghosts against the red walls."

Jurek stopped and drew a deep breath, but now I could see the palace, cold and remote in moonlight, with snow on the roofs and the great ballroom hung with crimson Genoese velvet, frayed in places and Heaven knows how many hundred years old. When he began to describe the dancers, clumsily, as if he pulled out each figure separately and set it on the table between us, I saw the furred velvet cloaks and the tunics blazing with orders, the women with their skirts of stiff brocade and their throats wrapped in jewels.

I imagined the glitter of colossal stones, the gold and the silver and the hundreds of candles set in crystal sconces.

"I danced with Olga," said Jurek in bewildered tones, "but she would not talk to me. I felt that she was thinking hard, she was afraid. And that night I really loved her. I would have married her and"—with a flash of mockery—"she would not have minded being unhappy. *She* had no fear of living. But before supper, she disappeared and I could not find her sister either. I remember hunting the rooms like a terrier. There were so many of them, the white saloon, which had a slippery marble floor, the gallery panelled with such dark wood and rows and rows of old portraits looking out of garlands of carved fruit and flowers, then the great, gold drawing-rooms where they danced. In the end, I found myself wandering about deserted places where the silk had frayed on the walls and dust powdered the tapestry. On an impulse I went out into the garden and I saw footsteps in the smooth snow. Beyond the bare trees and the bushes that sparkled as if they were covered with candles I looked at the great bulk of Count X's palace and I knew that if I followed the footsteps I would come to a little door that few people used. It had been made long ago when the two families had intermarried. I was frightened for no sensible reason, but I wanted to know what Olga and her sister were doing. They were only nineteen, but that was already a great age. So I went through a gate that should have been locked—but Olga and I had used it before—and I found the door hidden in an angle of the huge walls. I told myself it would certainly be bolted and that would be the end of my search. But it opened soundlessly and I went, shuffling and uncertain, down a long corridor with no light but the cold gleam from the windows. Of course, it was stupid, more than stupid. If I were discovered, I might be knocked on the head or made to fight a duel, and

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with the sword I am not quick enough. But I wanted to see Olga. That night she had got into my blood. I had to see her and make her listen. I had to touch her too. She was so small—nothing for a man to hold.

“I don’t know where I went. It was all dark and empty. There were such a lot of rooms. But at last I saw light under a door, and when I opened it there were green walls, stained and tattered, and moonlight gibbering through high windows. I stood in the middle of the floor, which shone and gleamed all round me, and I listened, for I could hear such a funny noise. It was like lots of hammers drumming on something soft, and it grew louder and louder until I realized it was my own heart. Then I knew that I must find Olga. Something terrible was going to happen. No, Sita, it is no use your asking me stupid questions. I am not English and I did know—how could I help knowing when there was such danger? I hurried through one shutterless room after another, but I went very quietly like a cat on my big feet. I did not stop. I went softly, softly up a white staircase that made into two at the top and I knew then which way I must turn. Like a cat, I tell you, I went through the saloons where the furniture was all covered up and at the end of them I knew was the chapel. In my ears there was so much noise that I could hear nothing else, but in one room I saw a table and chairs pushed back and I thought there had been a meeting. The Russians would have chosen their victims. Within a few days I should lose more friends. They would go in the night and nobody would know where. It was hideous and final, this dominion of the Tsars, and in my mind, which was divided, I thought also it was rather splendid—like all force. In front of me as I crept forward, always like a cat . . .” The simile seemed to please him, and indeed, crouched forward over the table, his knuckles kneading the cloth, there was something feline

about Jurek. His muscles were relaxed and his square, foreshortened head thrust forward, so that I could have touched the mat of shining, strong black hair and the bowed shoulders. "In front of me, then," he repeated, "was the ante-room to the chapel and light under the door. Sounds came from beyond it. There were many people, but I could not distinguish their voices. The streak of light on the floor made everything else look darker, and I was afraid. I have never been afraid like that." Jurek looked at me for the first time. "In a pink funk, you say—no, blue, what does the colour matter! You will never know that kind of fear. You sleep too well. You hit too many balls. You do not think. But I opened the door. Would you have done that? I opened the door, although I knew—don't argue with me—what I was going to see." He stopped as if to make certain of his memories, and when he spoke again it was in short sentences and the simplest words. I felt that he was putting things as crudely as possible in order to make credible the incredible. "I told you I knew what I was going to see, for I had been in that room before. It was octagonal. In each wall there was set a dark tapestry with a seat of red marble below it. The light came from candles. There were lots of them high up on the walls between the windows. The curtains were drawn. I remember the candles flared in the sudden draught and I thought I was dreaming. There were a number of men in the ante-room. They stood close together, reluctant, disturbed. I felt their emotion, and unconsciously I looked for the cause of it. The gates to the Chapel were open. They were golden gates, heavily carved and studded with jewels. You can imagine them. The altar had been lit and a priest moved in front of it." The breath caught in Jurek's throat. "Olga was kneeling on the altar steps. I could see her clearly, in her white ball dress and the pearls at the back of her neck.

I remember her hair. There was too much of it for her head. She knelt with her body bent forward and I knew she was making her confession."

While the man paused, struggling in the meshes of fantastic memory, I visualized the scene he described, and to it I added colour and form. I saw the sumptuous figure of the priest in cope and crown-like hat, with a breast-plate of precious stones, the ring, the cross, all the glittering symbols that probably were not there at all. I saw also the tall, lean figure of the Count who played host to the Russian Mission and was responsible for their secrets. My imagination clothed him in a gorgeous uniform, gave him a short fur-bordered cloak and put a dagger into his hand.

Then Jurek spoke: "That is all I know, really."

"Oh, go on, go on," I pleaded. "You can't possibly stop now."

"But there isn't any more," he said, and repeated slowly: "There was Olga kneeling at the priest's feet, the altar carelessly lit, the gates open and just inside them the Count standing very stiff, yet looking—somehow—dead—I don't know!"

"What did you do?"

"Nothing. I could not. The Russians nearest the door got hold of me. I thought they would stick half a dozen blades into me, but the Count stopped them."

"How? What d'you mean?"

Jurek looked at me stupidly, for he was back in the octagonal room with the candles guttering and the wax dripping on to the floor. "He came through the gates, stiff and sick-looking. It was then I thought he might have been a corpse. He said I had interrupted a family affair and he wanted my word of honour not to speak about it. I would not give it. The Russians made a fuss, and the Count said something about his sacrifice being sufficient. I

struggled, I suppose. I know I shouted, but Olga remained there, kneeling. It all happened so quickly. They got hold of my arms. One of the Russians complained that they were wasting time. Then the Count said in that stilted, cold voice which did not belong to him at all : ' My daughter was unfortunate enough to discover something which must remain secret. It is for Poland she dies.' The words reached Olga and she got up quickly and looked at me over the heads of the men. They did not move. From the altar steps she said : ' Yes, it is for Poland.' "

Jurek breathed deeply and said : " That was the end. I went mad. But there were too many. They dragged me out of the room and along a lot of passages. By the time they threw me out into the snow I was pretty well battered. Next day Olga was reported ill. Three days later her death was announced. They attributed it to an epidemic which had begun in the ghetto, where she used to visit the poorest Jews, and they buried her with all the ceremony they could think of ! "

" And you ? " I demanded.

" What could I do ? Repeat a story which would have been received as a drunkard's nightmare ? Everyone knew I had been in a brawl that night. I was ragged about it. Repeat a story which I could hardly believe myself ? No ! I was left with Olga's assurance that she died for Poland and the conviction that her words had an entirely different meaning to her father's."

In the empty restaurant we sat, staring at our coffee-cups without seeing them. Soon the supper guests would arrive. The waiters had put the last touches to the tables. They left us alone. " What is the explanation ? " I asked at last, but Jurek only shook his head. I could imagine him sunk in a defeatist lethargy, unable to accept or refuse the implications of the story. He would never make a satisfactory

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martyr except to his own tormented mind. "Do you really mean you know nothing? How could you bear not to know? You must have heard something. What happened to the sister?"

"She went away, ill, they said, the shock of Olga's death. Like most twins, I suppose, they had been inseparable. Each knew what the other was thinking. They used to laugh about it. Nada was supposed to have gone to an aunt in the country. Perhaps she did, but later, when her fiancé died in exile, she ran away. She may have joined the Nationalists who were working abroad, or played a more dangerous part in Russia. I don't know, for I went away myself, as far as I could, America and then the East. I only came back for the war, and then I heard of Nada with the Polish legionaries. She fought, they said, like a man. But I never set eyes on her after that night in Warsaw."

"Until to-night," I insisted, and we both looked at the place where the woman with the red scarf habitually sat.

"I suppose it is her," said Jurek. He did not want to make sure. He preferred the past mysterious and chaotic, like the centuries which had gone to his making. There was in his blood a confusion of authority and despair. The extremes of courage and fear struggled in him. His wild gaiety was an expression of revolt against the disasters which he believed inevitable. Accustomed to sorrow he regarded nothing as permanent, and indeed did not really want to keep anything except an alternate wealth and poverty of memory. But I persisted: "What is your own explanation?"

A waiter placed the bill, discreetly folded, beside the coffee-pot. Three Austrian officers came in and ordered Tokay.

"I have none—really," said Jurek. He was uncomfortable, but my insistence forced him against his will to fumble

as it were among the rubbish heap of recollections. "I suppose there was a meeting in the room where I saw the big table. The palace is as old as history. There must be hiding-places, any amount of them. My people have always needed to hide." He spoke bitterly. "There is hardly an old house in the country that has not its secret places. If Olga knew about the meeting and left my cousin's ball on purpose, she could perhaps have hidden somewhere behind the panelling. If she heard the Russian plans, she would have been in a position to warn the Nationalists. And if she were discovered the Tsarists would certainly have insured her silence."

"But why kill her?" I protested. "Surely prison would have been enough."

Jurek paid the bill and lit his last cigarette. He had returned to the present. Boredom made his face appear heavier than usual. He did not want to talk any more. "I wonder," he said vaguely. "The horrors of Siberia for a young girl, beautiful, alone—no, I think any father might justifiably prefer her death."

"So you explain it all?" I ventured, while I sought for my bag, which had slipped under the seat. As I put on my coat, Jurek rose and, leaning on the table, looked straight at me. For a moment he was lit by a strange, dark fire. It overwhelmed him.

"No, I don't explain it at all. For Olga was utterly happy when she died. She was more than happy, I tell you. When she looked at me, with death waiting, she was triumphant!"

The blaze died out of his eyes. In silence we walked to the door, but outside, in the street, I said: "I don't understand."

Jurek took my arm, and holding me close to him and shivering in spite of the heat, he said: "Of course you

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don't understand, my little spinach. You never understand anything. Let us walk. Your legs are so long and active. Let us walk and not think." Still holding my arm as if he longed for some reassuring human contact, he guided me towards the lights and the moderate amount of traffic in the Opera Strasse.

"What happened to the Nationalists?" I asked, and I expected a tale of arrests and executions.

But in a dull voice Jurek said: "Nothing, nothing at all. That is what I mean," and when I stood still in the middle of the pavement, refusing to move a step in any direction, he was forced to continue. "Olga cannot possibly have had time to pass on what she learned, hidden, no doubt, in some secret place. One can imagine her presence betrayed by a sound, a board creaking, a cough, anything you like—then her flight, and the pursuit by every man who had been sitting at that table. She would be caught at once, or at best within a few minutes. To whom could she have confided all the complicated plans she must have overheard? She had no time, I tell you. Yet the Nationalists *were* warned. Within a few hours there was no evidence left in Warsaw. Somebody who knew exactly what the Russians were going to do acted quickly—so quickly, *ma chère*, that the Tsar's emissaries were defeated. Not an arrest was made, not a paper discovered." Jurek spoke with his head down, looking at the pavement. The subject had ceased to interest him. It was old and covered with dust, like a host of gallant deeds that went to the making of an independent modern Poland.

Even when I insisted: "But *how*? How could they have been warned?" he only said:

"I do not know, but Olga knew."

We walked on under the lights, and Jurek's voice, very dreamy, came from over my head: "She knew her friends

were safe, knew her death would ensure their safety. Fatalistic, fanatical, *real*, she died triumphantly because she had saved Poland. Why?"

I looked up, and realized that Jurek was older than any of us had imagined. He might be any age. He was certainly old.

Then, with a gust of enthusiasm, he swung me round, and I felt the muscles of his enormous arm hardening as he almost lifted me off my feet. "We must dance," he said. A primitive gaiety transformed him. "And I promise not to tread on you too moch. . . ."

Weeks later it happened that I nearly missed the Orient Express. I don't remember where I was going—probably to Constantinople—but I certainly scrambled into the last carriage as the engine drew away from the platform at the Gare de Lyons. An exasperated porter threw my rug and suitcase after me. With a sigh of relief I turned to inspect my travelling companions. There was only one—a composed figure in a black suit with a scarf whose scarlet matched her lips and a man's felt hat pulled over her eyes. My heart missed a beat.

First stop Dijon. Of course I would speak to her. Wondering how to contrive an opportunity, I sat in the opposite corner and turned the pages of a novel with unnecessary persistence. Dijon already! It was not possible. Surely she would not get out. What could she have to do in Dijon? Hot and desperate, I blocked the doorway. Nobody else should get in. If they did, it would be over my effectively protesting body. A rattle of coupling-chains and the express gathered way again. Exhausted, I sank down in my corner and, furtively glancing at the cause of all my emotion, I thought I saw faint amusement in her eyes, but they were sombre and very distant under the brim of that discouraging hat.

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How could I address anyone so armed with silence and stillness? I don't believe she moved between Dijon and Mâcon. As the train jerked over suburban points, I opened my lips to speak. And not a word came out of them. Even my tongue was dry. I must think first what I was going to say, but I could not think.

Mâcon, Lyons, and always that profile, delicately but firmly cut, indifferent, immobile against flying fields, woods, villages and a clear autumn sky. In the corridor a monotonous voice cried: "*Premier service—Mesdames et Messieurs.*" Could I stumble over her feet on my way to the dining-car, apologize, and, before she diverted her attention, say: "Do please tell me why your sister was so happy when they murdered her?" She would have every right to appeal to the conductor. Imbecile that I was! Of course I could not speak to her. I knew it as I left the compartment.

It was dark when we reached Avignon, that city of the Popes, whose bridge marked the passage between temporal and spiritual worlds. The tomb of lost causes, but was it Avignon, or some other walled city with towers etched upon the night? When the train stopped, the woman rose and lifted a suitcase from the rack. Her movements were beautifully finished. She opened the door and, with her foot on the step, she looked back at me. My heart pounded. The breath caught in my throat. For a moment her grave eyes met mine. Then the door swung wide. She called: "*Porteur!*" I saw her scarf, redder than red ink, in the middle of the crowd on the platform. Quiet and unhurried the woman whom Jurek called Nada moved towards the gates. That was the last I saw of her.

But because of her, I longed to go to Poland. And in time my husband and I were invited to stay with the Rachinskys. They lived in Warsaw, and Joyce, the young English wife, who adored the country of her adoption, was minister-

ing to the palace, which for centuries had belonged to her husband's family, with intelligence and care. Room by room she restored its ancient beauty, but she did not hurry. There was time, she thought, and everything must be perfect.

I did not know my host and hostess at all well, but they were very kind in showing us a Warsaw that we could not otherwise have seen. Immensely hospitable, they took us to other great houses, where we heard discussed not only politics and history, but the legends which have wrought so rich a background for the Poland of to-day. After one such visit, I remember walking through the host of rooms that led from Joyce Rachinsky's sitting-room, deliciously panelled, with tall chairs covered in needlework, to my bedroom, and as I traversed the galleries and saloons which had not yet been touched, the delicate, faded silks, the uncurtained windows and the floors gleaming desolate in the dusk, reminded me of Jurek's story. Almost I expected to see light under a warped door, to open it, and to find Olga in her white ball-dress kneeling on the steps of an altar.

That night I repeated the story to Joyce, as we sat alone after dinner in her gracious room which invited confidence, and she said: "How strange, I have never heard so much of it," and then, leaning over the fire with a rich red light on her face: "It is a legend, you know. Perhaps your friend was actually there, as he said. Perhaps not. But there *is* a story about two sisters, twins as you say, and exactly alike. They belonged to a great family whose head supported the Tsar, but the girls were rebels. They were utterly devoted to each other, and obsessed by the Nationalist cause. It is difficult, of course, for us, who have always lived in a free country, to realize the intense bitterness with which the Poles, who had always been fighters, saw their country exploited and ruined by Russia. But if the story, as you have told it to me, is true, it represents only one of

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the innumerable sacrifices made by patriots and visionaries on behalf of their country."

"Do you think it *is* true?" I asked.

Joyce was a charming figure as she sat there, so vital and vigorous in her white dress, but she was too full of ardent life to be imaginative. "It is quite possible," she said in her deep, expressive voice. "One of the sisters certainly did die in sudden and unexpected fashion. For a day or so she was said to be ill, but nobody was allowed to see her. Then she was buried and her twin would not go to the funeral. It is so long ago, of course, that people have forgotten, or perhaps, still, they will not talk. The father is dead, and so many of the people who must have been present at that ball were killed in the war. But I have heard tales. I could even take you to the palace—it is empty now—and show you the hole behind the panelling where the girl is supposed to have hidden. It has two entrances, one into the room where the meeting was held and one into a gallery with many doors opening on to it."

For a minute or two we spoke of the heroism and the self-sacrifice which have made the terms 'patriot' and 'revolutionary' synonymous in countries less fortunate than our own. In Russia and Germany, in Italy, Spain and Ireland, in all the Balkan lands, history will be enriched by such legends, and many of them will be true. Inevitably, I asked: "Can you explain how Olga—if that was really her name—had time to warn her fellow-conspirators?"

Joyce looked at me with her clear, English eyes, and she said: "I don't think she had any time at all. I don't think Olga was ever inside that hiding-place."

For how long I stared at this other girl in a white frock, bearer of an equally historic name, I do not know, but at last I must have said: "What do you mean?" For I still remember her leaning forward, eager and a little im-

patient, proud, too, I think, because by marriage she belonged to a race which could rise to such reckless heroism.

"It is the only logical explanation, but of course I don't know if it is the right one," she said; and then, with her arms hanging over the dark, carved arms of the chair, relaxed, with her head against the velvet back, she continued, gently, as if she were afraid of disturbing the past: "It must be so. There really is no other way. You see, if it had been Olga who overheard the Russian plans, she *could not* have passed them on. There could have been no light in the hiding-place—it is no bigger than a cupboard. She could not possibly have written it all down while she listened. Yet everything that happened at that meeting was known to the Nationalists before morning."

"How?" I asked stupidly, and I repeated: "How?"

"But, of course," said Joyce in an unusually grave voice. "It was the other sister, Nada you call her, who hid behind the panelling. It was she who was engaged to a revolutionary. She was always the ringleader." My hostess lay back in the great chair, and her slow words continued: "She must have made some involuntary sound. You can imagine what you like. But when she knew she must be discovered, when she heard the men pushing back their chairs, hurrying towards the wall, she had a few seconds, a minute, perhaps, to get out into the gallery. Her father, not suspecting his daughters, would open the secret panel. He would do it impulsively to prove his loyalty to Russia, and those close to him would see a skirt disappearing, or a girl's back, perhaps. In the gallery, one can imagine Olga waiting. She would know what her sister was doing and she could not bear to be far away. So there you have the two girls together for a few seconds. They would rush into the nearest room, or round the first corner, the one who knew everything and the one who knew nothing at all.

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They would have time to exchange a few words. Then Nada, with her precious knowledge, would be forced to escape. Olga, wearing the same dress, the same pearls, looking exactly like the figure glimpsed for a second behind the panelling, would stay with no more coherent plan—at first—than to delay pursuit. She would deny nothing, probably she would not say a word of any kind, so as to give her sister time to get out of the palace. Then, when she realized that she could pretend to knowledge, that she could, in fact, play the part of scapegoat, while her sister whom she adored could go free to save friends, lovers, Poland itself, she must have decided at once, without hesitation. It was the only thing she could do."

At that moment, I realized that Joyce would have done the same. It might not be so difficult a way of dying—for those one most loved, in the presence of those one most hated.

In a flat voice, I asked : "Is that really the explanation ? "

"How can I tell ? " said Joyce. "It might be. But perhaps we are both dreaming." She laughed a little, and turned on the lights above the fireplace.

Things in the Night

A PACIFIC ISLAND

IN Paris there is a small, slight woman with hair that looks as if it had been lacquered. She lives for herself and she can do anything she likes with other people. When I had a flat in the rue de Surênes, just behind the Madeleine, I used to hear of her, for even then, married to a man she was supposed to detest, she had become a legend. Once I sat behind her in a theatre. She was pale and completely indifferent to the men on either side of her; equally indifferent to the staring eyes of the shop-girls and typists who craned their necks from the back rows as she passed them on her way out, dripping silver foxes. When I next saw her she was leaning over the rail of a liner bound for the Pacific Isles and Australia. There was no mistaking that particular carriage, or the slender American ankles. I wondered why so famous a lady had sailed away from the capitals of Civilization and was staring, without interest, at waters less troubled than those metaphysical ones to which she was accustomed. Unobtrusively, I moved my chair so that I could continue to look, first at the smooth, black hair that shone like deep pools, and then, as she turned, at the face which was as thoroughly closed and sealed as any document in an official despatch case.

I dare say I should have been content to sit there all morning watching the lacquered lady move up and down the deck and to wonder whether impatience or indecision inspired her to such unusual energy. But there was a young man who

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wanted to play games. Nothing would satisfy him but that we should attempt to throw rope rings over a peg, or rubber discs into a circle. Nothing could have seemed to me less desirable, but the young man was American and a journalist. He knew everything and I thought it might be amusing to hear what he had to say about the woman who had been born in New Jersey and had married one of the greatest names in France. So while we threw quoits in unexpected directions, for the boat was rolling, I talked about the passengers.

"A dud lot," said the young man. "The ship's no better than a morgue—in fact, a lot less interesting. There's not the first sentence of a story on board."

I raised my eyebrows as the fabulous lady passed without seeing us, and my opponent, cursing a quoit that rolled half-way across the deck, said, in a combination of accents, "She lost her husband a few months ago, did you know? And no great loss either, I'll say. He was a dry old stick, thirty years between them, and when he wasn't gassing about peace at Geneva, he was stirring up trouble at the Quai D'Orsay. Hadn't any use for a wife, except as a decoration. My word, she had some stones, a proper constellation they were, and she used to look as if she hated them."

I asked the obvious question: "Why did she marry him?"

"She didn't. At least not so as you'd notice it. Her people made the match. She was in love with a young fellow about as ineligible as they're made—all his past in front of him—but he was shovelled out of the way. Very hush, hush! You know how they do it."

I had not the least idea and I doubted if my companion had either, but I wanted to hear the end of the story, so, throwing my last quoit with such abandon that it hit a commercial traveller on the ear, I suggested a more sedentary occupation. The American agreed and, while he drank his second pink gin, he gave rein to his imagination. "I can tell you," he

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said, "I saw that woman come out of church on her wedding day looking about as lost as a cat introduced to an octopus in deep water."

"Go on," I encouraged.

"There isn't really much more. She likes difficult men, other people's men. They say she can't resist a happily married couple, and when she's through with them, they don't even remember they ever were happy!" The young man grinned. "What more d'you want?"

"Something with oranges and no alcohol in it, please."

I wondered what the subject of so many legends was doing among missionaries, salesmen, minor officials, and prospectors, most of them on their way to the hot, forgetful islands so yielding on the surface, with their mock sophistication, and so ruthless underneath. I wondered what she would do in the future.

"Go get another husband," said the young man, when I propounded the question to him. "Several of them, I dare say."

I remembered a Syrian girl who, seated on a harem roof in Damascus with scent from the apricot-gardens drifting up to us and the murmur of the seven rivers, said to me in the voice of a New England school-marm: "The great difference between us and you is that we spend our time making one man happy, while you devote yours to making many men miserable."

The wind strengthened and the Pacific responded. Crested breakers raced across the surface. The ocean gathered itself together and piled into steep green seas. These fell upon the liner, which staggered and recoiled under their impact. The journalist went below. He had remembered, he said, some work which needed his immediate attention.

I went out on to the slippery deck. The elements were at war and in their conflict I found satisfaction. It was fun climbing the precipitous slopes and leaning back against the

solidity of the wind when the bows plunged downwards like a plane with engine trouble. In disgraceful shoes, borrowed from a fellow-passenger who believed in rubber, I lurched round the decks, wet, wind-blown, and happy. At the most exposed corner, the storm suddenly took charge of me and, before I could recover, the lift of the stern sent me on to my nose. Conscious, in spite of my condition, that I had fallen within an inch or two of admirably wrought shoes and even better ankles, all of which seemed to have left their appointed place in the scheme of gravity, I made clumsy efforts to rise. But my rubber soles defeated me.

From somewhere in the skies came a charming voice, "I hope you are not hurt," and hands full of character took hold of me. Next minute I had been placed upon my reluctant feet and was face to face with the woman who had so far spoken to no one on board.

"No, not at all," I muttered, and then, indulging one of my worst habits by saying exactly what I felt at the moment, without waiting to think, I added: "I'm so glad ! I did so want you to talk to me and now you have. So it was great luck really, wasn't it ?"

For a moment the still, colourless face, on a considerably lower level than my own, looked as if yet another shutter were being closed. Then the lovely arch of the brows lifted. The dark eyes lost their secretive expression and a smile made the lips young and ardent. In fact, the fabulous lady was flattered and my frankness, for once, had no dire results. On the contrary, with a murmured, "How absurd you are !" she suited her pace to mine and we walked round the deck together.

For the rest of the voyage, it seemed to me, we continued to walk round and round the deck, while I poured out the whole of my life history, which was then a mixture of Baedeker and Burton. My sole ambition—a mild one, I thought—was

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to see everything, everywhere, at once, and whatever I saw I wanted to talk about. I was, in fact, very young.

My celestial companion, whom I was prepared to adore as well as admire, told me nothing about herself. I did once ask her what she was doing on such an inadequate ship loitering between the lesser known parts of the Pacific, and she replied : “ *Disons que je suis ‘ à la Recherche du Temps Perdu.’* ” I doubt if I recognized the quotation, but I thought if she were really in search of lost time she might do better in a less languorous climate. When I said so, she retorted : “ It seems to me that, perhaps, after all I do not want to find it. Tell me, what can one do with the past if it is again within one’s hands ? ”

Having had no past, I could offer no advice on such an involved subject and I was, without doubt, relieved when the legendary lady laughed and asked where I was going. “ To Pago-Pago, ” I said, and thought that her eyes narrowed. They were like a cat’s and their shape seemed to alter with the colour.

“ Why ? ” she asked, with gravity.

I could not possibly tell her that I liked the name—it was engagingly absurd—and that I expected a South Sea Island to be made of coral, polished pink or red. So I talked like a lesson in geography and my companion very rightly did not listen but, after a while, she said : “ A man I used to know grows something animal or vegetable, and certainly unprofitable, in the neighbourhood of Pago-Pago. It is a lovely place, I believe, though not provided with what my maid calls ‘ le comfort modern.’ ”

To such phrases I, in turn, did not listen, for I found the sound of the American-French voice more attractive than what it said. And, most enchanting of all, I found sitting in the extraordinary lady’s cabin and watching her do quite ordinary things that immediately acquired the significance of

ritual. She had such lovely possessions. A scent whose name she would not tell me hung about her clothes and her luggage. Books with serious titles were piled upon the table and everything else seemed to be made of unusual and precious materials.

There was a photograph of two small girls and in the corner of the frame a snapshot of a young man, so faded that the features were unrecognizable. "My daughters," explained the occupant of the cabin in a voice that attached no importance to the matter. And days afterwards, when I had landed in Pago-Pago and found it not at all red or pink, except for the bougainvillea, I remembered the smooth, remote little face, cupped in dark hair, with, at that moment, the expression of an idol carved in shining ivory. No doubt I was imaginative and easily impressed, but my excuse is that for the last fifteen years innumerable others have been equally moved by this lady of quality whose genius is for destruction.

In Pago-Pago, civilization was then represented by the American ships in the harbour, by the metal skeletons wrecked long ago on the reef, by the amount of clothing worn by the natives in deference to missionary opinion, and by the tinned foods in the stores which opened on to rain, red mud and a profusion of leaves. I found the hotel engaging, though it could certainly not be called comfortable. In those days it consisted of a row of rooms above the open-fronted shop which sold everything from mackintoshes to brightly coloured pills. They all gave on to the same wide verandah which was the combined club and bar of Pago-Pago. The mosquito-netted doors were transparent, so everything could be seen as well as heard, but the men who sat most of the day and far into the night, in a line of dilapidated rocking-chairs above the main street, a lane deeply rutted, running out of the harbour into the hills, were very polite. They turned their backs upon the rooms which contained each an iron bedstead,

a table, a wooden chair, a basin, a pail, and two pegs, and when they were not drinking whisky sours and gin slings, they stared dreamily across the tin roofs of the little town, half smothered in flowering creeper, to the palms that framed the sea.

Pago-Pago may now be a prosperous commercial centre, the harbour congested with shipping, and the streets full of noise, automobiles, and the smell of gasolene-pumps, but in those days it was a gentle scrap of a port and, apart from the American governor with his invisible hierarchy of officials, the most important man in it was the hotel-keeper. I remember him as large and unexpectedly hirsute, bursting out of pyjama trousers, a khaki coat tied across his chest with a piece of string. When not in a rage he would do anything for anyone and he knew more about the island than the missionaries who held themselves a little apart, as if conscious, not of superiority, because they were simple, hard-worked, and generally underfed, but of dedication. They alone had no time to talk. But the store-keepers and traders, the few planters who came down from the hills, the odd men, who were understood to be interested in geology or fishing, made up for it.

On the wide and none too solid verandah outside my box of a room, I heard all sorts of conversation, much of it incomprehensible. Inevitably, someone would speak about the natives who wore printed overalls, or an excessive amount of white cotton within sight of the town, but not much more than their own brown skins in the hills. They were good-natured and utterly unreliable, subject to the unyielding resentments of children and impregnated with superstition. They believed whatever their witch-doctors told them and were capable of deserting in one night a place where they had lived uneventfully for years because the old men, who ruled them by fear, predicted a change of fortune. And these old

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men, who were undoubtedly possessed of curious powers, could curse a house, a family, or an entire herd into premature decay.

At this point in the conversation, some man would be certain to draw ineffective lines on the floor with the point of his stick or a muddy boot and explain that so and so had found 'a sign something like this' in the dust outside his house or in the wet slime under the eaves, and immediately his servants had left him. Generally, this was the prelude to an amazing tale which ended in unreasonable and unpleasant death.

Not long ago in London I sat next to an exceedingly intelligent ex-Cabinet Minister, a Liberal by the way, who had travelled a great deal, and à propos of the hypnotism practised in many parts of Africa on some of the most plastic human material in the world, he said to me: "I know; I've heard such stories first-hand from reliable sources, but it is utterly impossible for me to believe them."

Sitting on the verandah at Pago-Pago and hearing of men who died without ever having been ill, who were killed by an agency without physical resources, I must have felt some of the ex-legislator's resentment but not his burden of helpless and irritable disbelief, for, in the Yemen, in Western Arabia, while I was waiting for a caravan in the house of Sheikh Sa-eed near Meidi, I had seen an Abyssinian slave sicken and die for no reason at all except that another woman was jealous of her and had, with the aid of the local witch, ill-wished her to her own anguish and the interested expectation of every member of the harem. Since then, I have seen the same thing occur in several different countries. It is no use saying it is impossible, because there is scarcely an Arab between Morocco and Muscat who cannot tell you of some experience which is beyond our Western comprehension. After all, how many hundred witches were tried and burned in England and Scotland for casting a 'murrain'—whatever that is—on their

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neighbours' crops, cattle, or children, and if ninety-nine out of a hundred suffered for no more than that they were unlike other people, it is reasonable to suppose that the hundredth at least was executed for what she had really done. At Oaxaco, in Mexico, a woman was condemned for witchcraft as late as 1873 and the account of the trial, which seems to have been extremely fair, can still be seen in the records of that ancient city.

Of all these things I reminded myself, while I listened to hard-faced planters, grey, quiet and worn by the relentless tropics, who looked as if they had not a grain of imagination left in them, talking what provincial England would call 'arrant nonsense,' and treating it as one of the accepted facts which must be taken into consideration when dealing with local problems. After a week of this I thought I would follow the hotel-keeper's advice and go inland.

"You'd better make for Suvalinda," he said. "It's the prettiest village on the island and the Chief'll put you up—that is, if you'll be content with a few feet of his floor. A rare old man he is and a good friend of mine. He'll show you a bit of native life if you don't mind eating sea-worms—they taste like spinach—and yam. Maybe you'll get sucking-pig sometimes, but don't drink anything you can't see. Those long-necked clay bottles are generally as full of cockroaches as water, and remember if you are offered angona, it doesn't matter what you think of it—and it's a foul taste I must admit—you've got to empty the coconut-shell at a draught and send it spinning back across the mats, like this." The large man upset three glasses with a sudden twist of his wrist, picked them up again and said he would try to find someone to go with me for the first part of the way. "Not that you can miss it. There's a fork about four hours up in the hills and you take the right-hand path by the breadfruit tree."

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I pointed out that there were a large number of breadfruit trees in every direction. In fact, one rarely saw the sea except as a background to their futuristic gesticulations.

The hotel-keeper laughed, pulled up his trousers so that more bare and bitten ankle and less paunch showed. "Everybody knows the road to Suvalinda," he said, as if it were a macadam highway, "but maybe the schoolmaster'll go with you."

Naturally, I had a vision of a wan man in spectacles and a frayed European suit. His hair would be thinning and his lips pinched. He would have colourless eyes, a collar, and yellow shoes, blunt at the toes. But towards lunch time next day, a tall figure between black and brown stood under the verandah and called to me in pictorial English.

"That is the schoolmaster who is going with you," explained the hotel-keeper, leaning far too heavily on the rail and emitting a flow of the local language in which a dozen words at least must be used for each of ours. Unendingly, it seemed to me, the lilting speech continued. At last, the hotel-keeper raised himself from the railing, swept several insects from his neck, and said: "There's some difficulty about horses."

Simultaneously, a charming but mournful voice cried from below: "No, no! I have already found one poor, weak horse, and a new one that is just out of bed."

The description amused me and I descended to have further speech with the schoolmaster. I found him leaning gently against a pillar, scratching his head with a stick. He wore a coat which through repeated washing had shrunk to half its normal size and a nether garment of white cotton, half kilt, half loin-cloth. His feet and legs were bare and he rubbed one large black toe up and down the post behind him. It was an acrobatic feat and I watched it with interest. The man was sad and slender, of kindly nature but uncertain of

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his capabilities. While he continued to scratch among the splendid ruff of hair that stood up upon his head, he gazed at me out of eyes glutinous as brown toffee and drenched in syrupy moisture, and said that never in his life had he ridden a horse, but some people found it easy to do so and he would call for me at six the next morning.

I was waiting for him with a rug, a pillow, and a sack containing my few personal possessions and some tinned food. The hotel-keeper had refused to allow me to waste my elegant cardboard suitcase on the hills. "Besides, it would melt if it really does rain——" I thought it had done nothing else for the last week, but the large man assured me that it had hardly even been damp.

The horses were little more than oblongs with a leg at each corner, but, in view of the schoolmaster's limitations, I mounted the one which looked as if it might possibly have a spark of life left in it. Doubtfully, my companion hoisted himself on to the other and, clinging to saddle and mane, dug his bare toes into its ribs. The animal promptly put its head between its knees, lifted its hindquarters and gave one—just one—colossal buck. It was sufficient. The schoolmaster flew head first into a hibiscus bush. His haversack went after him, shedding the most peculiar objects on the way.

Having rid himself of all alien matter, including the saddle, the horse stood still. Its withers sank. Before the schoolmaster was out of his bush, it was giving an excellent imitation of sleepy sickness.

"Which is that one?" I asked curtly.

The native, no longer so immaculately black and white, for a good deal of red mud now adhered to his clothes and skin, replied in a surprised voice, "I think he is what they tell me very young child just out of bed, but he never have saddle on before."

With a gloom equal to that of my companion, I removed

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myself from the 'poor, weak horse' which had a distinct gleam in its eye and, having seen that the saddle this time was properly girthed, I mounted the three-year-old. The instant he felt my weight he tried to repeat a performance which he had found thoroughly satisfactory, but I would not let him get his head down, so we proceeded along the lane in a series of skips which must have been highly diverting to the onlookers. The sack of provisions was fastened behind the schoolmaster, much to his delight as it gave him something to lean against and also, in his own words, 'it help keep the horse down.'

Up into the hills we went, my mount resigned, I thought, to the inevitable, the schoolmaster following nose to tail.

"You will get kicked," I said, but the gentle creature could not believe in the iniquity of man or beast. So we went on between palms which are the most old-fashioned form of decoration, like aigrettes in a Victorian toque, and breadfruit trees sprawling in shapeless, but excessively modern disarray.

The forest drew closer on one side and on the other the slopes dropped towards a sea of blue glass. After an hour or two, deceived by the demure demeanour of the 'new horse just out of bed,' I ventured to put up my umbrella, for the sun beat violently between my shoulder-blades and I had eaten taro root for breakfast. Within a minute I was rolling down the hill-side, umbrella and all, acutely conscious that my breakfast had not been all that could be desired. Above me, a surprised and delighted animal of equine origin hung its head and contemplated immediate dissolution.

With intense fury I picked myself up and, shaking off a quantity of insect and vegetable life, I restored myself to the saddle while the schoolmaster murmured, "Regrettable, very smart, you not hurt?" and stuck his black and prehensile toes further into the sides of his mount.

It was shortly after this that I discovered my companion

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had not the least idea where he was supposed to be taking me and I had forgotten the name of "the prettiest village on the island." This description failed to rouse any response in the scholarly breast, so it looked as if we should just have 'to go on till we stop' as my companion helpfully suggested.

The day passed and the hills did not noticeably change. They were more or less precipitate and covered with low, thick vegetation. We rode till close on sunset, but covered rather less than two miles an hour because the schoolmaster fell off with surprising regularity. Much time was lost picking him up, catching the horse, and restoring them to their relative positions. "Very hard work, riding, so painful sit upon and for the head," remarked the poor man, charming and uncomplaining. "We better sleep in village. Perhaps horse not so unkind to-morrow."

"By all means," I retorted, "but where *is* there a village?"

"Plenty," replied my companion with alacrity. Turning straight into the bush, he was, not unnaturally, swept out of the saddle by some creepers, after which he went on foot, holding his horse by the extreme end of the reins so that both of them became helplessly entangled among branches and plants. Eventually, however, we came to an unexpected plateau and there was a village in the shape of half a dozen thatched roofs supported on poles with neat matting underneath. Each and all of the householders offered us shelter and we soon found ourselves seated in the middle of an earthen floor raised a few inches above ground level, surrounded by a score of islanders, golden-brown, with superb teeth and most of their possessions stuck in their hair. When, having used my comb, I laid it for an instant beside me, the headman took it up, tried it on his own head, then placed it with a pipe, an implement for scratching the back, a thin bottle of oil, and various other domestic utensils in his thatch of curls.

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"A useful store-cupboard, not so?" said the schoolmaster in careful English.

That night we ate fried roots and insects wrapped in leaves, while outside the children played a game not unlike cricket, with a coco-nut for a ball, but the batsman, armed with banana wood, fielded while everybody else made runs. Later, we all slept upon the palm-leaf mats which were very hard and the natives, who never moved or made a sound, wrapped themselves, cocoon-like, in red cotton stuff which, during the day, they wore as skirts, or shawls negligently draped from one shoulder. Thus, they defeated the insects which made an excellent meal of my unprotected face.

In the morning, I asked for water and the schoolmaster, already clean and shining, told me there was a pool a few hundred yards down the hill. While I bathed, he assured me, he would keep toll of every villager. Not one, not even the smallest child, should stray in an inconvenient direction. He was as good as his word, so, discarding breeches and boots beside the water which glowed deep green under the trees, I plunged into it and swam round and round till I felt I had rid myself of the stiffness and discomfort as well as the imaginary dirt of the night. Then I clambered out again, and I had just got my shirt over my head when a party of young hunters pushed their way out of the undergrowth. They had evidently come from a further valley and were unaccustomed to finding clothed strangers in the middle of the forest. But they showed no surprise.

In single file, they passed along the edge of the pool, naked but for a strip about the waist, their long spears glinting in the shafts of sunlight. When they reached the place where I was struggling with buttons, the rest of my garments hanging flagrant upon a large-leaved bush, the leader greeted me courteously. Puzzled, he bent forward and felt the texture of my shirt. He then delicately pulled it to one side, and

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having satisfied himself that I was no different from the other women whom he was accustomed to see walking about with a scrap of a petticoat round their hips and nothing at all above them, he repeated his grave salutation and, with his followers, passed quickly out of sight.

I cannot remember on what we breakfasted, because, while we were eating, the headman drank a good deal of a particularly pungent liquid which the schoolmaster had brought for the purpose, as I understood, of preventing insects nesting in his hair, but it may have been solely a beauty preparation. In any case, it was *not* a drink, and in view of our host's expression, we thought it wise to hasten our departure. In this, of course, we were frustrated by the antics of the three-year-old which, refreshed by a night's meditation—it surely could not have slept with mosquitoes thick upon its coat and its mane literally wadded with them—kicked everything within reach, including the sack of food, which promptly burst.

In those days the natives of the Pacific were still rather apt to regard horses as an outsize in cockroaches, and it took some persuasion to induce the young spearmen to approach anything so unnatural, but when they did get hold of the 'perhaps big pig' they would not let go and I was able to practise opening and shutting my umbrella while a cluster of amused and very gentle savages incited my justly exasperated mount to do its worst.

In fine fashion we bounced off the plateau, followed by the chanting tones of the schoolmaster who, determinedly adhering to all the wrong places, urged his horse into an amble while he opined that the headman would undoubtedly die and he himself would never be able to afford another bottle of such expensive lotion. To comfort him, I promised him anything he liked in the way of colourful and strongly scented unguents, after which we proceeded peacefully upon our way.

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It was cool and quiet in the hills. We had no more views of the sea, but sometimes we came to clearings where the natives grew bananas, millet and pineapples. At one of these the schoolmaster stopped to converse with some men who had limed their heads so that they looked as if they wore white wigs. He seemed to be disconcerted by what they told him and after awhile he dropped so far behind that I thought his horse must have gone lame.

"What's the matter?" I asked, and he looked at me secretively, like a child which does not want to tell what it knows to be the truth because the grown-up will not believe. When I persisted, he said: "We go to a bad village. It is evil and we should not go on."

"Why?" I asked, in a matter-of-fact voice, and the schoolmaster, working his toes up and down to the discomfort of his horse which did not like being tickled in the ribs, said: "There is a witch man up there who very strong."

"Well, let's lunch and talk about it," I suggested.

We sat under a convenient tree and ate tinned food which, to the schoolmaster, was the height of luxury, but although he was grateful because I neither laughed nor argued, he would not explain what he meant. He just repeated, "It is not good. The missionaries say 'no' and the Government forbids—but it happen."

In the end, he said regretfully, "You go to village if must. I must not, so go home." As an afterthought he added that an Englishman lived somewhere in the same direction, up in the hills anyway—he gestured towards the sombre range in front of us—and that I could spend the night with him.

The end of it all was that the schoolmaster, imploring forgiveness and understanding, without words but with a wealth of eloquence in his frightened brown eyes, went back along the path, hands and legs clinging to the salients of the 'poor weak horse' which would only go its own pace and

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that on the outside edge of the track, while I, with the thwarted three-year-old, continued upward.

In the late afternoon, with the forest thickening on either side, I began to wonder if I had lost the way. By sunset I felt sure I had. The path had degenerated into a succession of ruts filled with water. Branches trailed across it and at times I had to dismount and drag my horse after me. Just as I decided I had better go back, I heard, far away at first and then nearer, the soft sweetness of lutes supported by drums.

By this time the young animal, who had hitherto carried me well, was showing signs of exhaustion, so I resigned myself to walking the rest of the way to the village which must now be near. Holding the bridle, I pushed my way along what I hoped was a track, in the direction of the drums, and within a hundred yards I met the oddest creature I have ever seen. I did not know if it was a man or a woman, for its skin, the colour of dried leaves, was accordion pleated over prominent bones and its hair, streaked with chalk, stood up stark as skeleton fingers. But it was the eyes which filled me with a curiously physical dismay. They were light and opaque, red-rimmed, with the thickened lids of a white negro, and they stared at nothing. Worse, they stared through all which they should normally have seen, to those small, secret places where we keep the qualities that nobody must ever know about except ourselves.

With an effort demanding a good deal of will-power, I roused myself from the inertia I felt creeping over me as I stood still, unable, unwilling to resist those eyes which measured what they should not even have seen. Hurrying up the thread of a track, I refused to allow myself to look back. If the eyes got hold of me again, I should surrender all that was impregnable in myself. I should have nothing left.

With my heart pounding, I clambered up a slope, dragging at the three-year-old's bit, and from the top of it, I looked down upon a village. The thatched huts, pleasantly reminiscent of mushrooms, appeared to be deserted, but from them came the insistent call of the drums and the tender stringed instruments that the islanders make out of gourds. Instinctively, I connected the music with the creature of uncertain sex whom I had met in the woodland.

Suddenly, I wanted very much to go back to Pago-Pago, where the rain clattering on corrugated iron, the gramophones, and the discordant sounds of eating and washing represented security. But already it was night among the trees. Only, in the clearing ahead, a grey half-light permitted me to distinguish, some way up the further hill, a haystack house larger than the huts of the village. Towards this I hurried, and unconsciously I diverged from the main path in order to avoid passing close to the musicians who remained invisible.

The house, shaped like a rick, stood on a ledge which had been developed into a terrace of neatly beaten earth. It had a solitary opening in which hung a door of new, unseasoned wood. A hen crouched on the stone which served as a step, and to one side of it, deeply grooved in the mud, were signs that I had seen copied on the verandah at Pago-Pago. Before I had time to consider their probable—or improbable—meaning, an English voice asked: “What in something, something and a good deal more than that, d’you think you’re doing here?”

Transferring my attention from the mud to the figure which had appeared in the doorway, I observed a tall man of anything between twenty-five and thirty-five, sunburned, freckled, with reddish hair and grey or green eyes. He carried a lamp and the light shone upwards on his face. He looked annoyed and also, I thought, half dead.

Unreasonably reassured, for neither his appearance nor his

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expression were at that moment particularly prepossessing, I began to explain, and either my fluency or my obvious intentions drove the man back into his house. From the doorstep, I concluded : " You can't turn me out into the dark ? "

" My good girl, what on earth do you suppose is going to happen to you if you stick to the trail ? The moon will be up in an hour and there's a large village over the hill with a perfectly good rest-house in it. You'll be able to get fodder for that odd, equine specimen and any amount of chickens and eggs for yourself. Much better go on."

" What could happen to me here ? " I asked, coming as far into the house as the length of rein permitted. I did not want to lose the three-year-old, and who knew what effect on his nerves the far-away yet insistent drumming might have.

The man made a surprising answer. " Everything or nothing. Depends how you look at it. Do you believe in witchcraft ? "

" No, " I said, and then with more honesty : " I don't know anything about it. I met a horror in the woods before I reached the village."

The man looked at me with sardonic amusement. He did not appear to be afraid, only very ill. " Glassy stare and creepy crawlies down your back. ' From things that go bump in the night, good Lord deliver us ! ' I know. That's the chief high mugwump all right. I've been up against him for months. He extorts a toll of pigs and grain from the wretched villagers, and they daren't refuse to pay even when it means not having enough left for themselves, so I thought I'd give them a lead. He cast covetous eyes on my pine-apples—I export 'em and, all things considered, don't do too badly—but I wasn't parting with a single one. Hence the stuff on the mat, so to speak. I'm cursed."

By this time I had found a chair and, still within reach of the doorway through which the three-year-old was now eating the new straw of which the walls were composed, had seated myself upon it. I felt static. Nothing would induce me to move, and of course it was all nonsense about witchcraft and curses. We were not in the Middle Ages. I said as much to the man who had obviously no desire to act host and he retorted: "I wish I knew."

He was unshaved, I noticed, and he looked exhausted, but he argued for a long time before, with an impatient "Have it your own way! I don't care!" he allowed me to establish myself in one of the windowless straw-walled compartments opening out of the living-room. There was a camp bed in it and a packing-case to act as a table. On the further side a doorway opened on to red mud. A papaia tree and some bananas provided shade and bats hung under the eaves, clucking and chuckling, while all around, more persistent even than the drums, giant cicadas beat their wings and frogs indulged in their curious guttural gargling suggestive of water blocked in a tap.

That night I went to bed without exchanging another word with my host, except on the subject of the three-year-old's accommodation in a shed which showed no signs of being waterproof. I expected the voracious animal to have eaten most of it by morning. But, before I woke, a jug of water had appeared in my corner of the haystack and there was a smell of coffee, and eggs sizzling. When I came into the living-room, I found a table set with an adequate amount of crockery and my host, shaved, with a cut across his chin.

Sunshine poured through the open door. Several hens fussed about the threshold. In fact, everything was reassuringly normal except the colour of the man's skin and his eyes, which looked as if he could not shut them.

"That horse of yours is dead lame and I should think it

will have colic as well. It's eaten half the garden and it hasn't even stopped at the house."

I apologized profoundly and I did not ask any questions, with the result that the question of my departure was imperceptibly deferred. I did not want to have to walk all the way back to Pago-Pago and I did most decidedly want to know what was going to happen between the planter and the wizard. I might never again in all my life meet a wizard. As the schoolmaster implied, they were forbidden by law, or, as I have since read on the page dealing with Serowe in that admirable work of reference, the *East and South African Year Book*, they are 'suppressed, while education is greatly encouraged.' But on the second day, when I had learned the name of my host and I felt we were on the brink of friendship, for he had allowed me to make an omelette and had even acknowledged that he was 'a bit under the weather,' I asked with diffidence, since the climate could not at the moment be blamed for his discomfiture: "What exactly is the matter with you?"

"I can't sleep. I don't believe I'll ever sleep again."

"Why not?"

"You forget I'm cursed." The man's voice was mocking, but his eyes, which should have been clear and a trifle arrogant, for he was strongly built, younger than I had at first thought, with good bones and the shape of an athlete, were blotched with veins and so deeply sunk that, at times, it seemed they would disappear altogether into his head.

At that moment I felt pitiful but outraged, for I did not approve of things which I could not understand, and during the hours and the days which followed I must have made a continuous nuisance of myself by asking, "Can't I help?" or "How can I help?" Exasperated, I insisted that there must be something I could do and the Cornishman, who had inherited the imagination of Celtic ancestors, always made the

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same reply, "You *are* helping." Sometimes he added: "It's great having somebody to talk to."

But all the time I felt that he knew much more than he would tell. "You'll have to get out of here before the new moon," he said once.

"Why?" I asked, seated on a packing-case under the papaia, while I sewed buttons on a varied collection of shirts.

Deryk Trelowen stretched his arms wearily and I thought that his face looked as if it had been dragged out of shape, but he smiled as he said: "Oh well, old Beelzebub is sure to get active about then and I'd rather you were out of the way."

"Oh," I retorted, annoyed. It occurred to me that the Cornishman did not mind dying and I wanted him to mind. I pointed to the pineapples, acres of them, sitting up stiffly like green and yellow porcupines. "Don't those tempt you to live?" I asked with heavy sarcasm.

"Not particularly," returned Deryk, "but I must say I'd hate to be done in by that old rag-bag." His smile had gone. It had never been very convincing, but the expression which took its place hurt me more than I would acknowledge. For I realized the man did not want to fight. He did not care what happened. He only wanted the end.

Needless to say, I refused to leave the haystack house above the pineapples. With its haggard owner, I sat on the terrace of beaten earth and listened each evening to the drums and the lutes in the village, to the frogs and the bats and the great locusts chanting their chorus and, by the time the old moon had waned, I expect I was more than half in love—with the situation as much as the man.

I remember that I went about with a number of unaccustomed aches under my elegant blue shirts, which I had to wash myself in a tub beneath the banana trees, and I did not feel at all assured, or cool, or calm, but perhaps this was the

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fault of the magician who had gone into retreat in the forest.

The climax came one night when I woke from a deep sleep with the certainty that someone had called to me. I think I must have replied as I hurried out of bed and across my straw-matted cubicle which, like the living-room beyond, was in darkness. As I stumbled across the threshold, I put my bare foot on something inconceivably horrible. It was wet and cold, yet underneath there was a living warmth. It moved and the cloying softness of it stuck to my skin and pressed up between my toes. With a squeal I leaped back into my room.

When I had contrived to light a match and forced myself to look at the thing outside my door, I found I had stepped full on to a large wet hen that was still too surprised to move.

Thoroughly ashamed of myself, yet still appalled by the horrible cold stickiness of those wet feathers against my sole, I stalked across the central portion of the hut. The match went out as I reached the further door, but a hurricane lamp hung from the centre pole that supported Deryk's roof. By its light I saw the man fully clothed and seated on the edge of his camp bed, with a revolver in his hand. His body was rigid and his face stiffened by a fearful expectation. "Get out!" he said. "For God's sake go! It's coming—I can feel it."

Somehow, I flung myself across the room and, catching my foot in the matting, tumbled on to my knees beside him. Simultaneously, the light went out. It did not flicker as it would have done had there been insufficient oil. The flame was slowly withdrawn.

In the darkness, I felt Deryk trying to pull me to my feet, but I was much too terrified to move. I only hoped my body was not shaking as much as everything inside me.

"What is it? What's going to happen?" I asked, and was relieved to find my voice comparatively steady.

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As I spoke the room became luminous, although there was no logical source of light. A shadow which had no right to be there appeared in the doorway, and with it, both of us felt without seeing, something came into the space between the straw walls.

A funny sound crackled out of my throat and Deryk put his arm round me. "It's all right. Don't look," he said. And then: "Keep close to me." His voice was hard and quiet, but, pressed against his shoulder, I could feel the strain of his muscles and the damp chill of the shirt clinging to his skin. I could also feel the sweat on my own forehead. It ran into my eyes and slowly my spine began to shake. I don't think I had ever before felt that strange dissolving of bone and flesh. With it came an appalling numbness. It rose from my feet to my knees and thighs, and when it reached my stomach I was conscious of intolerable nausea.

"It is absurd," I said aloud and very clearly, but the walls were pressing in on us. Something desired to materialize. I felt inside myself the force of this tremendous purpose and I thought my body would break under the strain. The pressure increased. I was panting. In a moment I would not be able to breathe. But Deryk's arm tightened round my shoulders. He said something like: "Don't give up. It's not really there. It's just our imagination, you know. If we can keep on resisting, we shall win. We must win." His voice was steady and reassuring in its sudden intimacy.

"I'm all right," I retorted, forcing the words between my lips and considerably startled by the sound of them.

"Don't look——" repeated Deryk, and his breath quickened. I felt the swift hardening of his will as he fired six times into the light and dark that were now without form.

I thought I heard a laugh, but not with my ears. There was certainly some sound which neither of us made and it was in my own head, yet outside any known dimension. At

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that moment I had no power to speak, to move, or even to close my eyes. The only thing which held me to earth and sanity was the grip about my shoulders. "It's not real," insisted a shred of voice that I did not recognize as Treloewen's. "Remember—it's in our own minds. We can get rid of it."

Scarcely a yard from our faces, a head materialized. It had no body, yet it did not look decapitated. It was not even particularly horrible. I did not feel as much physical repulsion as when I had stepped on the wet hen, but, in some extraordinary way, I seemed to be unfolding. Layers of myself were falling away so that the eyes in the head looked right into me. Deeper and deeper they looked, those pale, cold eyes belonging to the dried-up creature I had seen in the wood, and all that had grown in me secretly was revealed. The ultimate courage that, between birth and death, every human being keeps sacred in the core of himself, was laid bare and, in the light of those eyes which saw everything, it shrivelled. There was nothing more left. I was empty. There was nothing to hold flesh and spirit together.

The face moved forward, or else it increased in size. I imagined its breath on my skin, but that did not matter because already I was destroyed ; the thing had penetrated deep within myself. I must be going to die, unless, perhaps, I was already dead. I could no longer feel Deryk's arm. In final revolt, I struggled to lift my own, but found it paralysed. I could not move, yet all my body was falling away. In an agony of dissolution, I tried to speak, but my lips remained still. It was over then. I was finished.

I don't know if I actually lost consciousness, but while I drifted beyond pain and beyond terror, the most extraordinary sound came to me. Later, I realized that it was Deryk laughing, but at the moment I resented it because it dragged me back. Waves of chaotic noise beat against my ear-drums, and all the feelings that had been stripped from me returned.

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With stiff lips, I began to babble. My arms moved. My eyes focused on the furniture in the room. I felt my shoulders crushed in Deryk's grip.

The face was still there, imprinted on the growing light, but it had no real existence. Its power slowly withdrew. I saw shadows creep back into the room and became aware of a sudden emphasis on shape and size. The lamp burned clear above us. "It's over," said Deryk. "It's gone. Look!" And he relaxed his hold.

On the floor I had been crouching and on the floor I remained. I was so cold that I could scarcely feel my hands and feet. My body was agreeably light as if it might float away at any moment. "What did you do?" I asked in a stupid voice, and wondered what I meant.

But Deryk, equally bewildered, said: "I don't know. I just held out, resisted, and then I thought it was no good. I felt I was cracking, splitting open. It was disgusting and ignominious and I wouldn't acknowledge it, so I laughed. That was all."

We looked at each other doubtfully. Then I asked: "Did you feel too that all you'd never known about yourself was being revealed, that something terribly private and intimate was being used against you? I can't explain, but it was as if all my own weakness and failures were being turned into weapons. If we had died, we should have killed ourselves." I groped for more explicit words, but they would not come.

Deryk said: "Yes. I felt that too." Then he turned away, and while I still sat on the floor, utterly exhausted, empty of emotion, without any wish to move, he must have fetched whisky, for after what seemed to me a long time, he pushed a glass into my hand and said: "Drink it. You're frozen."

The next moment I was in his arms.

"My God, you're cold. So am I." We sat close to-

gether on the edge of the camp bed, drinking neat whisky, too tired to think or to speak.

Then Deryk said: "It was damned gallant of you to come—"

"You called," I interrupted.

"I did not. I never made a sound."

Incapable of argument, I began to rub my hands which were still curiously numbed. Deryk struggled to his feet. He moved clumsily and his face was grey. His clothes clung to him as if they were drenched. "Stay here," he said, "and put some blankets round you. I'll get a fire going. Then we can have a hot drink."

He went into the living-room, and because I did not want to think about what had happened—or what we imagined had happened, for no doubt the wizard was, physically, miles away in the forest—I forced myself to enumerate the objects in the room. There were not very many and they were all excessively ordinary—a table, a chair with one leg cracked, a washing basin, clothes hanging on pegs, the marks of muddy boots on the matting.

In order to warm myself, I walked about the room. There was an ink-stain on the table, but no ink. Automatically, I turned over a pile of books and papers, repeating to myself the titles. Under the last magazine lay a photograph. I recognized it at once. Young and peculiarly dauntless, the lacquered lady stared up at me. She had not changed.

When Deryk came in, considerably restored and carrying a kettle, he found me still looking at the photograph. It fascinated me as its owner had done. Without a word, he took it from me.

Next morning we sat under a breadfruit tree. I felt remarkably spacious. There was room in me for many new feelings, all of them on a majestic scale. But Deryk looked worried. He talked awkwardly of unimportant matters.

'He thinks I'm in love with him. Perhaps I am. I wonder what woke me last night.' Ideas wandered gently through my mind, while Deryk spoke about his life on the island.

'I've given myself away and it didn't do any good,' I thought, for my intervention on the previous night seemed to me now excessively absurd. I wanted to apologize for it, but Deryk was saying, "Not much for a woman to share." And I knew what he was going to suggest.

Embarrassed, delighted and enraged, I looked at his face and it was unusually grave. His expression emphasized his detachment. Evidently, he saw something beyond the flowering welter of the island. 'In another minute he'll ask me to marry him,' I thought, 'and he doesn't want to in the least.'

For a moment, no doubt, I struggled with rebellious inclinations. Deryk and I had shared an elemental experience. We had, I was sure, faced death. The atmosphere of the last few days had been tremendously dramatic. I was still under its influence. If I did not persuade myself that we were destined for each other, I was, with some justification, inclined to suppose that with no other man should I ever suffer such fundamental reactions. In fact, the struggle was momentarily, perhaps, as sharp in its way as that which had taken place twelve hours previously between our two Western minds, trained to disbelief, and the hypnotic force of the old witch-doctor willing our dissolution. Then, before I knew what I had decided, Deryk asked: "Well, what d'you think of it?" He must have said a good deal more, I suppose, while I was thinking—in romantic fashion—of the lacquered lady and the quest she had suddenly abandoned.

"I don't think," I retorted, without grammar or coherence. "You're not in the least in love with me. I rather wish you were——" And then I hurried into the tale of the fabulous and fantastic woman who had travelled across the Pacific 'in search of lost time', and had most foolishly allowed more

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time to slip through her fingers because she had not had the courage to land at Pago-Pago. So I put it, in my sentimental folly, and I forced the man to believe. Then, with supreme lack of logic, I was hurt because he turned into an entirely different person. Looking as if he had regained a lost Olympus, he said : "I was a fool ever to let her go, but her people wanted her to make a good marriage." He leaped to his feet, with an ironic salutation to the pineapple fields. "A fool, yes, and fools deserve this sort of thing."

It was the last time he would ever see the absurd fruits sitting up, stiff and prickly, so he could tell them what he thought about them.

His eyes blazed and his sunburned face grew red. The lines were wiped out of it and with them the memories and the miseries of years. Pago-Pago and the first boat. That was all he cared about.

"Well, I'm not a fool so you needn't have offered me your pineapples." I said, with an admirably arranged laugh.

"You're a darling," retorted the young man, shedding years. And with complete indifference, he added : "Hurry, hurry ! Where's that ridiculous horse of yours ? How long will it take you to pack ? We must get down to the port."

We got down—most precipitately—and in about a quarter of the time I had taken to come up. Deryk caught the first East-bound boat. No doubt he reached France as quickly as steam would take him, but he did not marry the lacquered lady.

I don't know what happened between them. I never saw Deryk again. A year or two later his lady, more fantastic and fabulous than ever, married just such another as her first husband. Since then, several books have been written about her. I have recognized her in at least one play. Relentless, cool, amused, she rules her world of men. What happened

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to one of them, who grew pineapples in the hills behind Pago-Pago, I have never been able to discover. I don't even know if he took to drink, or if, like his prototype in the play, he put a well-directed bullet into his head. Probably not—for he too may have found that lost time was not worth recovering.

The Inefficient Ghost

THE ATLAS MOUNTAINS

THE steamer behaved like a broody hen. It was only a small coasting boat and it wallowed into the troughs between the waves with a luxurious roll. I could imagine a fowl shaking out her feathers and settling down in just such a fashion. But unfortunately the vessel lurched out of the smooth, green hollows and climbed unsteadily over the backs of other waves. It was most uncomfortable, and the crowd of Arabs, seated damp and mournful on the decks, divided their hopes between sunset, when prayer might or might not effect a change of weather, and the evening meal, after which they would certainly feel better—or worse.

When I heard the clatter of plates and smelt things frying in oil, I went forward with the idea that the tormented seas sweeping through the Straits of Gibraltar might be preferable to the pained expressions of my fellow-travellers faced with polypus, swimming in rancid goat's butter and stuffed with garlic.

There was only one good cabin on the boat. Situated under the bridge, it belonged, for the duration of the voyage between Oran and Casablanca, to a Pasha who was supposed to be taking his daughter as a bride to one of the Caids of the Atlas Mountains. I had heard rumours that the girl was destined for the great Glawi, whose earthen strongholds dominate the range behind Marrakesh, but nobody had yet

seen her, and the Pasha talked only to a few grave and bearded Arabs, hard men with wind-burned faces, upon whom neither the sea nor the rolling gait of a camel had any effect.

As I stood beside the rail, watching steep green arches of water rear up against the bows, I thought I heard a sound behind me. Turning, none too steadily, I saw that one of the shutters of the deck cabin had been opened. A hand in a white woollen glove held on to the window-sill. Above it was the usual *haik* of North Africa, the colourless cloak of sheep's wool or cotton which hides the Moslem woman from the crown of her head to her instep. Under the tent-like folds one can imagine as much beauty as one chooses. Generally the lady is of a shape that is better hidden, but long ago in a Syrian harem I saw loveliness beyond description, and I have never ceased to hope that some day, under another *habbara* or *haik*, I may find its equal.

Glancing, with a mixture of respect and discomfort, at the woman who looked out of the cabin window, I observed a veil spotlessly white adjusted so close under the lower lids that the long brown lashes curled over the fabric. The cloak of fine white wool was so arranged over the head that it hid all but the eyebrows shaped like swallows' wings. But it could not hide the eyes, and to this day I have never seen anything like them. They were the colour of sea-water, clearest green, but changing as if clouds cast shadows on them and wind added a deeper lustre. They were long and splendidly set, their beauty accentuated by the carved lids and those almost incredible lashes.

Shamelessly, I stared, and the gloved hand pulled the veil a fraction of an inch closer under the surprising eyes. It was a proud gesture, and in deference to it, I returned to my contemplation of the waves. They seemed to me peculiarly colourless. I could hardly believe that I had really seen that deep, tropical green, the green of jewels and of

still water within the reefs of the coral islands. I wanted to look again, although I have always contended that the most beautiful thing in the world is that which you see only once. In attempting 'to make assurance doubly sure,' one is apt to lose the certainty that one originally possessed.

So I did not turn round to face those cool and grave young eyes, utterly indifferent to the amazement which must have been their usual tribute, until I heard the shutter rattle against the frame. Then it was too late. I saw only a head, its shape lost in the thick, white *haik*, turning from the window, and the dark shoulder of a servant as she closed it.

Farther away, with his back against the rail, stood the only other European passenger. He too stared at the window from which the woman or girl had glanced for a moment at the outer world, and he looked as if he had lost a fortune, or received a blow on the back of the head. Leaning a little forward, he continued to concentrate on the shutter with its blistered varnish, and I spoke to him with considerable acerbity, for it was undoubtedly his presence which had disturbed the vision. "You oughtn't to be here—" I said, and the young man retorted :

"I suppose she was real."

He was big and fair, with a great expanse of shoulder and a careless manner. I judged him to be a Dane or a Swede, and I soon learned that he had served five years with one of the mounted squadrons in the Legion and was now mining in the Atlas. We talked a little, while the sea flung the ship about with good-natured violence, and the atmosphere suited the man standing with legs well apart, his shirt open and his head bare.

He told me about the manganese mines in the blackened rocks above Bou Denib, and the French couple who kept the inn. They were characters, he said, and they had a child of three who was the devil himself. That infant had

seen everything, arson, smuggling, brawls and murder, and all it did was to beat its spoon on the table and ask for more. It could drink burned rum with the hardest drillers in the place, and it had never been known to cry.

The loose-boned man did not remove his hands from his pockets. He said : " You'll loathe Casablanca—it's a bad imitation of Marseilles. When you've seen the walls of Marrakesh—and they are as good as anything, relentless, you know, and unending, like something wounded but still vindictive—" The Norseman's eyes gleamed. He had imagination and a sense of the dramatic. " Well, when you've seen the red walls—and don't look too close at anything else—you'd better get a car with an Arab driver—they're the cheapest—and come right round the Atlas. You won't be able to get across by Midelt. The snow'll be too deep. And that's all to the good, because you'll be able to spend a night at the mines. They're worth seeing—you'll never get nearer hell."

Then he spoke of the scarlet desert, farther south, the limitless Hamada, strewn with a queer grey fungus called the *gherds* like those I had seen farther east, cliffs hardened by sun and wind, rising sheer out of the sand and shaped into battlements and pinnacles. I could imagine them, a hot, dull red, standing above the *wadis* which are dry river-beds. If there was any water, there would be palms like shaving brushes stuck upright in pink cotton wool, for south of the Atlas the desert is highly coloured. The pill-box forts of the Legion stand stark and desolate on the edge of unlimited space. Between them and the mountains there are mud-built villages, with a froth of almond blossom breaking over the walls. In the last and least accessible of these, not very far from the mines, Glawi had one of his many fortresses.

It was odd, I thought, that, with the Arab girl in our

minds, we did not speak of her at all. The Swede—he came from an island near Stockholm—had not even answered my first protest. He had a body made of springs, but his eyes were like a cat's. They hid under the sunburned lids, and they changed with the light. The man's name was Jonson, the J pronounced as a Y, and I don't think he cared what he did. He was young, certainly, but hard with the resistant qualities of somebody who has always had to fight and who has seen to it that—by some means—he won. I had met a good many like him among the privates or troopers of the Legion. They were good in a battle, and very much the reverse when they were bored or had drunk too much of the local poison.

The morning we arrived in Casablanca, Jonson, whom I suspected of an undue interest in the occupant of the deck cabin, came up to me while I watched the growth of the white houses, square as slabs of coconut icing, or pseudo-Moorish, with arches and colonnades. He was restless and wanted a companion. So, with his powerful shoulders propped against the ladder to the bridge and his eyes fixed upon the door through which I was certain the Pasha's family would not come until everyone else had disembarked, he told me more about the mines. They were, he said, the refuge of anyone who wanted to escape the law. The police did not trouble to pursue the more ineffective bad characters into the mountains. It suited them very well if the riff-raff of the coast chose to do a job of hard work far removed from their usual doubtful haunts. Jonson grinned cheerfully, showing excellent white teeth. "We've had a few deserters trying their hands at mining instead of road-making, but they don't stay long."

I guessed that he was exaggerating for my benefit, but he left me with a grim picture of rocks, blackened and scarred, with mud cabins plastered in a cleft, and the inn, a white-

washed square with high walls at the head of the first slopes. Below, among the recurrent sand waves, there was a French post, with one officer and a couple of Spahis, but they remained in the plain. The mines were a law to themselves.

While the coasting boat wore her way into the quay, the Swede added : " The place is haunted."

" What by ? " I asked, without much interest.

" A dago of sorts, but there should be any number of ghosts. That inn is the oldest building in the Atlas. It has seen more killings than any other place in Morocco, perhaps in Africa."

" Tell me about them," I said, trying to picture the French provincial couple, intent on the cash-box, with their demon child, against a background of unwashed rascals, the sweepings of every Mediterranean port. The Swede did not fit in, and I was obliged to make the setting more conventional, but the man beside me said : " Long ago the White Fathers had a mission somewhere there. They were the first to penetrate the desert and the mountains. They paid with their lives. You must know the story of de Foucauld and a dozen others. They were fine men. But there were others who just died and nobody heard of them. Where the mines are now, a grand old priest used to give shelter to anyone who asked it, and he did it once too often, of course. The hillmen whom he thought were his friends came down and surrounded his house. They demanded their victim and the priest would not open the door, but neither would he fire a shot to protect himself. The Arabs soon smashed a way in. They killed the Father, and what they did to his guest doesn't bear repeating."

The fair man paused and leaned with greater negligence against the companion. He rolled a cigarette with strong, blunt-tipped fingers, and continued : " The place got a bad name, but its walls still stood, so travellers going north to

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Algeria, or by the coast road towards Fez and Meknes, used to shelter occasionally in the old mission building. Before the French got hold of the country, a whole caravan was murdered there. It had come from the desert oases and I don't know what it carried—slaves, perhaps—it was so long ago. But when the next party arrived—months later, who knows—but it was, I believe, in the middle of a sandstorm, they found half a dozen skeletons just where they'd intended to sleep. They stayed with the camels in the yard, I should say, for Arabs aren't too keen on ghosts!"

"But which is the ghost?" I asked. There seemed to be plenty of choice.

"Oh, he's just a harmless creature in one of those big straw hats over a sort of turban like they wear in Dakkar. Nobody knows much about him. Some say he's a Spaniard from the Rio D'Oro. We get a few of those wandering up from West Africa. He may have been knifed in a quarrel and still feel resentful. Anyway, he's a ghost now and not likely to do more harm, although there's others can always be counted on for a row. Not that the place isn't quiet enough these days. The baby's getting sort of disillusioned."

The Swede laughed. I found him engaging and wondered how many of his tales were true. He spoke a curious English, evidently collected from men with different accents and twists to their sentences. Sometimes his descriptions had Irish colour. At others they were severely East coast. I thought I detected various influences when he did not think about his words, but always there was the careless tolerance of the man who can make his own life and if necessary take other people's.

"Why do you stay in such a place?" I asked with some curiosity, and Jonson replied :

"There's money to be made."

Later, from officials in the little towns at the foot of the

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and were well-brushed. He had a beautiful blue cloak and eyes suited to his situation. Unfortunately, he was expecting the visit of a superior, and his mud-house had only one bedroom. He offered it to me at once, but he had, he acknowledged, just ridden forty miles, and the only other place to sleep seemed to be in the mud of the yard, so, remembering the proximity of the manganese mines, I said we would force another few miles out of our reluctant car and sleep with the ghosts in the inn.

The Frenchman smiled. "There is only one, and he is gentle. Madame Courbet will make you comfortable, as far as she can. Her husband is for the moment away. *C'est une brave femme, celle-là.*"

Surprised at his evident admiration for the *patronne*, I asked about the child who was already a devil and the supposed scoundrels who took refuge in the earth when it was no longer safe for them to be seen outside.

The Frenchman acknowledged that the miners were not very tractable, and that there might be criminals, potential or actual, among them, but he seemed to think Madame Courbet was worth a posse of police. "She treats them like bad children," he said, "and they are terrified of her. As for her own infant, he has already the experience of a politician and the cunning of a profiteer. Without doubt he will be one day President of France, or, *tout au moins*, a *député* of the extreme Left."

Excited beyond measure at the idea of meeting this prodigy, who had never wept and with whom a revolver was more popular than a stick of chocolate, I hustled the little Arab back into his car, and, with a succession of startling noises, we proceeded—in spasms—across the plain. At the foot of the hills, where the ground rose abruptly amidst a litter of fungus and stones, I had to get out and push. The driver, who would, I felt, have been happier on a camel,

put down both feet at once and urged me to further efforts. The car stopped, nor could we induce it to start again. Despondent, with our more valued possessions slung upon our backs, we started upwards. In dusk we reached the rough ledge on which the inn stood squarely, with the mountains soaring behind it and a deep fissure cleaving them into separate masses.

I don't know what I had expected Madame Courbet to be like. As we approached the porch, of more recent structure than the rest of the house, I remembered that nobody had described her physical appearance. Evidently that did not count.

Guided by the Arab, I went round the end of the clay verandah which seemed to have no connection with the house, and, passing between several outbuildings, we came to a double wooden door, the only apparent opening in the mud walls. "*Patronne, I bring you a guest !*" shouted the driver, and after he had repeated the information several times, a woman came into the yard. She had black hair arranged in waves which turned up from the back of her neck. It was surprisingly neat and glossy. Her teeth were square and strong. Those were the things I noticed first, for the thick vital hair and the flash of her smile differentiated her from all other burned, brown women with large, rather splendid curves under inadequate cotton dresses.

"*Tiens, how is it that you come here ?*" she asked as she led me into the house, and I felt the warmth of her interest. She wanted to know everything. She had to know. Information was part of her equipment. Amiable and vigorous, she took hold of my baggage and thrust it into the arms of an Arab boy, with orders to fetch water and a towel. When we reached the small, whitewashed room in which I was to sleep, she turned to me with expectant good-nature. "*It is not very grand, enfin, but it will do, will it not ?*"

The furniture consisted of a table with the marks of many glasses on it, a tin basin, and a bed made of planks bearing a straw mattress and two black blankets. The window had shutters that looked as if they had been cut straight out of a tree, and the door, opening on to the yard, a bar as broad as my arm.

"It will do very well," I said, and then I remembered the ghost. "It isn't haunted, is it?"

"But no, no!" retorted the woman, and I saw the glow in her eyes and the warm red blood under her sunburn. "There is only one haunted room, and a big Swede sleeps in it. He would make short work of any spectre—a miner, you understand, but with money to spend."

That night I ate in the long, whitewashed café with a naphtha lamp swinging over the counter at the further end. The walls were cracked and stained. On the window-sills stood rows of empty bottles with half-burned candles stuck in their necks. I was favoured with a cloth and a napkin, but most of the tables were bare. Round them, as the hours passed, collected a number of men who looked as if black had been ground into their skins. They were not superficially smeared like coal-miners. Their flesh seemed to have absorbed the hardness and the darkness of the rocks. Some were French, talking a harsh *patois*, others Italian and Spanish. I thought I recognized a German, heavier than his companions and more silent. There were various brands of half-castes and some Nordic types, but all of them showed a certain uniformity. They were spare men, with reddened eyes and muscles like cording. Hard and dark, they leaned upon the tables and talked without spontaneity, while they drank the local alcohol and rolled black tobacco between strong, discoloured fingers.

In the angle of the bar and the outside wall, a child sat alone in a high chair. He must have been nearer four than

three. His face was white and smooth. In it the dark eyes looked like holes, and they were the more surprising because of the hair, which stood up in a lint-white peak. I thought of a fat, white lizard, utterly still, but with its greedy, brilliant eyes darting all over the place.

From behind the counter, Madame Courbet spoke to me : " You must make acquaintance with Raoul. He is villainous, the little one, is he not, but what an intelligence he has ! "

Raoul, in the smallest and stiffest of shirts, was eating chunks of meat off the blade of an enormous knife. Beside him was a mug filled with red wine. He paid no obvious attention to me or to his mother, but his eyes, screened with a curious, bright blankness, took in everything that happened.

At eleven the boy was still there. " He never sleeps," explained Françoise Courbet, " and he waits always to see the miners drink their rum." She took a jug from the counter and went the whole length of the room, pouring something into each man's cup, from which the dregs had been previously thrown upon the floor.

The miners scooped up spoonfuls of the liquid and called to the woman to put out the lamp. One of them lit a few candles and the shadows crawled and clung about the room.

Motionless in his tall chair, Raoul stared at the men who were striking matches and lighting the alcohol into which they had put slabs of sugar. Suddenly every face was thrown into sharp relief by a blue-green flame. The room disappeared. There was only the child's paper-white head and the hand in which he still held the knife, the coarse, misshapen features of the miners, the lines hewn into their cheeks and throats, and the vast, crouching mimicry splayed behind them.

One by one the flames burned out. The bright points of the candles flickered in the draught. The child sat quite still, but the miners drank and relaxed. Their shadows

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climbed behind them. Heads bent together. A raucous laugh echoed in the half-light. Then one of the Spaniards, leaning too far back, upset his chair. The man who had laughed kicked him as he sprawled on the ground. Without a second's hesitation, the Latin drew a knife, and, as he rose, he struck upwards. The blade caught the edge of the table, and its owner cursed. The laughing man got in a blow, and the Spaniard reeled against the wall. I thought there would be a wholesale fight, but Madame Courbet advanced with the motion of a barque under full sail. The flap of the bar opened. The men gathered round the disputant drew aside. Straight upon the Spaniard with his fury and his knife came the *patronne*, full-fleshed, with her print frock tight across hips and bosom. She was not really such a large woman, no taller than the average and still firmly shaped, but I thought she would smother the Latin, who crumpled before the momentum of her cool, concentrated approach. I did not hear what she said. I did not see exactly what happened to the lean, yellowish man, who backed towards the door. Somehow he disappeared. Françoise turned with a swing of her strong body, her eyes and her teeth gleaming, confidence in every line of her.

Her son had not moved, except to raise himself so that he could the more intently observe what might have been manslaughter. Still in that taut, watching position, he stared at the miners gradually resuming their positions, but his small face was bored.

“What a courage he has!” said his mother, returning in smooth triumph. It was a delight to watch her move, for she appeared to have no feet. Actually, these were small and badly shod, but the woman was so well-balanced that she appeared to flow without particularized motion, in whatever direction her energy proposed.

Next morning my driver, still bearded, but several shades

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lighter in colour, informed me that, having washed and said the dawn and the second prayers, he would now devote himself to the car. In three days, it might be ready. When I saw him an hour or two later, there seemed to be little car left, but a great deal of intricate-looking material was strewn around a figure dripping grease and sweat.

Despondent and not a little bruised, for the straw of my mattress had been insufficient to protect me from the unyielding planks, I went to look at the mines with Jonson, who seemed to me darker and more preoccupied than I had known him on the boat. But this may have been the effect of the rocks, savage and naked, which bared their scars to the sunshine and heaped their swart desolation into the most forbidding forms. Between them and into them we went, in company with camels, donkeys and shabby hillmen, all uniformly blackened. Even the local women with their graceful flowing garments were stained to the same harsh duskiness.

Jonson explained to me about the working and the sale of manganese as we crept into the cliff face, or watched Promethean beings come out of it, bearing dark burdens or pushing trucks loaded with equally sombre substance. It was all very gloomy, and when the wind blew it was painful as well, for the grit got into one's eyes and stung one's skin. I doubted if I should ever again be clean, and was delighted when the Swede suggested we should ride into the mountains. He said he had friends in one of the fortified *kasrs*, whose mud walls and towers follow the lines of the hills on which they are built. I agreed that we would start early the following morning, and I was amused when the *patronne* opposed the plan. She followed me into my room, less assured, I thought, than usual, and although she looked me straight in the eyes with that bold, vivid warmth of hers, she spoke doubtfully. "He is a bad character, that Jonson.

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At one time he was in difficulties with the Government, an affair of smuggling, you understand, and that is not good here, for the Arabs are not used to alcohol. It kills them slowly, like rot in old wood."

Madame's capable square hands hung by her sides. She never made unnecessary movements. Her vitality was a deep well on which she could draw. She did not waste herself in words or actions. "Now, it is said that he will make trouble over a girl in one of Glawi's houses. Oh no, she does not belong to the Caid himself, but she is of good family, and will be the bride of a cousin. It is a folly to interfere in such matters. The Arabs here are not venial like those in the towns. Jonson will find himself one day full of lead, and I shall not say that he has not deserved it."

Perturbed, and no doubt somewhat excited, I asked how the miner could hope to get in touch with any female inhabitant of an Arab stronghold, and Françoise replied: "For money, no doubt, there would always be some woman to carry a note. A gift might be accepted, but it would not reach its destination. And in the end there would inevitably be a betrayal. Glawi has rifles enough at his command, and, *mon Dieu*, the Government is not going to interfere to revenge a foreigner with empty pockets."

In spite of Madame's warning, I rode into the mountains with Jonson and I tried to make him talk about the girl with the eyes of dreams and sea-water. Perhaps, in my conceit, I intended to tell him how utterly impossible it would be for a woman of her class and upbringing to have anything to do with a foreigner. I remembered the pride with which she had drawn her veil closer. While she lived, no stranger would catch so much as a passing glimpse of her beauty. All that she demanded of the outer world was the privacy due to her position and enjoined, so she had been taught, by her religion.

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But the Swede would not discuss the vision we had seen for a moment while the little ship lurched through the Straits. He made no difficulty about acknowledging that the girl had been brought to the great Kasr we could see far above us, firmly planted, its towers like the trunks of trees, upon a mountain crest, but more he would not say.

While we sat in the shelter of some rocks, eating a very tough chicken and sheets of excellent native bread, I ventured to relate what happened to an Arab girl in Damascus because she encouraged a man whose suit her father disapproved,¹ and the Swede, exerting the strength of his fingers upon a recalcitrant bone, looked at me with contempt. He had difficulty, I thought, in holding back the words he wanted to say. Greedily, he tore the chicken to pieces and ate large mouthfuls. So he would treat life, I supposed. Strong and avid, he would take what he wanted and care nothing at all about the cost.

While he licked his fingers and his eyes ranged the wide expanse of desert that lay below us, he said: "It is a fool thing to let life get you down, and it will, surely, unless you go straight at it and make it give you what you want."

I thought how much the man wanted, but before I could say anything he continued: "Money first, that is necessary. Money gets you a long way and you've got to know men in order to use them. And there is always one woman you must have——" He stopped abruptly. His voice had not softened. He threw me the reins of my horse and swung himself into his saddle. "We'd better get on," he said.

In another hour we had reached the houses that clung like swallows' nests below the walls of the Kasr. There were not many of them, but from the first came a bent man with a peculiarly yellow face, and to him the Swede spoke in Arabic. Soon we were seated in a mud-walled room

¹ *Adventure*, by Rosita Forbes.

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with the mountain-side falling steeply below the door, and, behind and above us, where we could no longer see them, those towering windowless ramparts of beaten earth, slave-built, perhaps, that guarded the secrets of a Moslem chief.

I remarked on their inviolability and Jonson said curtly : " The place is infested with spies. Trust the French to have their agents here. They've got their noses into everything, but the system's rotten. It leaks, and since you're with me —whether you like it or not—I don't mind telling you that I'm going to take advantage of one of those leaks."

He laughed at me, his wide mouth stretched so that the teeth made a bar between his cheeks. He looked like a healthy animal. His superabundant strength evinced itself in every movement of his body. He had not yet been hurt or afraid. He had no idea of danger except that which he represented to other people.

We sat upon a carpeted earthen bench which ran round three walls, and a boy brought bitter coffee in cups without handles. For some time our visit seemed purposeless, but at last a woman came in. She had bare feet and a multitude of red skirts swung about her ankles. I could just see them under the earth-coloured *haik* which did not suit her quick movements and the free swing of her body. I thought she must be of nomad blood, and wondered how she fitted into the household walled in spirit and in fact.

As soon as she entered, the crippled yellow man slipped out and stood looking, alternately, at the path by which we had come and upwards to the small square houses plastered under the Kasr.

Jonson did not change his position on the hard couch, but he spoke urgently in a low voice to the woman, who stood some distance away from him with her *haik* across her face, hiding even her eyes. She seemed unwilling to do what he asked, and at last, with unrestrained impatience,

he thrust a small package towards her. The tent-like coverings parted and the parcel disappeared, yet the woman was not content. I could not understand the dialect they spoke, and I disliked the whole performance, so I went out into the sunlight and in a minute or two Jonson joined us. I thought that money passed from his hand to that of the stooping yellow man with eyes like pebbles, and then we mounted and the Swede urged me to hurry.

I was annoyed because I wanted to see more of the Kasr, and when Jonson would not break the silence I asked : " Why did you bring me up here ? "

Turning in the saddle, I met his narrowed eyes, devoid of insolence, but self-absorbed and satisfied. There was no need for him to answer. The presence of a European woman had provided the necessary cover. Even if the emissary from the Kasr had been observed, she had only to ascribe her visit to my presence in the cripple's hovel. She might just possibly be an Ouled Nail, one of those dancing girls from the Algerian plains who go where they please, generally unveiled.

" You will be shot," I said to Jonson, " quite soon, I expect. These mountaineers are very good shots, so you probably won't even know when it happens."

The Swede laughed.

When we reached the inn, Madame Courbet, who had watched us ride down the last slope, said much the same thing, but with more venom. It occurred to me then that she doubted her authority with the big Norseman. Their strengths were equally matched, and neither would give way. Both, perhaps, had more knowledge than is generally considered good for a civilized human being. They were accustomed to its use and misuse. Each, I thought, suspected the other of some reserve—of infamy in the case of the man, of craft in that of the woman. As a result, they admired and profoundly distrusted each other.

That night it was comparatively warm, and there happened to be few miners in the *café*. So the *patronne* and I sat upon the porch, which had no entry to the house except through a window with a broken shutter. This swung to and fro and the sound affected my nerves, so that I said suddenly to Madame Courbet : "Are you never afraid of these miners ? They look as if they'd do anything—though I dare say that's because they never wash—and this house would encourage them. Don't you feel how violent it is ? It has known too many horrors. I believe it wants more !"

The Frenchwoman smiled, and I felt her assurance as something warm and tangible. She said : "We shall have a storm. It is always like that with the nerves when Sirocco blows. To-morrow the desert will have disappeared, and you will hardly be able to see outside the house. The wind will make a blanket of the sand, and we shall all be covered with it. Fortunately it will be too thick for the miners to move. Otherwise there would be some throats cut ! They quarrel always in the Sirocco, and it is fortunate if they remember to use words instead of knives."

The *patronne* evidently considered she had sufficiently reassured me, for she did nothing to stop the melancholy creaking of the shutter, and I soon imagined it to be a voice crying out of the night, which was thick and heavy. I felt things pressing round me and I could not help turning to see if anyone had come into the verandah. Finally, I pushed my chair back against the wall and said : "When you shut the doors at the back, is there any other way of getting in ? How were those merchants murdered, and the Spaniard of whom nobody seems to know anything except that he is now a ghost ?"

The Frenchwoman remained composed. She said : "When the White Father was killed, they broke down the door, and I do not think it was properly repaired. As

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for the merchants, they were sheltering after a long, hard march. Blinded and deafened by the storm, they were helpless before a whole band of brigands who poured in with the wind and the sand." Madame became eloquent. She described the crash of breaking timber and the shriek of Sirocco. "*Enfin*," she said, "they were all dead before they knew much about it." Rocking herself gently in a chair unsuited to the purpose, she continued: "With the Spaniard it was different. You will understand that he had interfered with a woman in the village. I do not know why he took refuge in this house, but one night an Arab climbed the wall, and that was the end. It also happened in Sirocco."

"Oh!" I said blankly, and then: "Can people still climb the wall?"

"It would be difficult," returned the *patronne*, "but certainly there is one place that should be mended. Do not frighten yourself, Madame, all these crimes happened in the Sirocco, and now whenever that *sacré* wind blows, the ghost of the Spaniard walks." She looked at me triumphantly. "Is that not enough protection? Do you imagine any of this *canaille* from the mines, which is not—all the same—so bad at heart, or the Arabs who are even more superstitious, would venture here at such a time? But no, they shut themselves into their own holes and curse or say their prayers. It comes to the same thing." Madame rocked with increasing vigour, but the chair stood the strain. I could not imagine her balance being disturbed, even by an inanimate object.

The following day was one of the most unpleasant I have ever spent, for a brown fog blew up from the desert and the myriad particles of which it was composed penetrated every pore of our skins. In a state of intense irritation we pushed our way through what seemed to be wildly flapping sheets, for Sirocco fell upon us like a solid presence. It

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swirled triumphantly out of the south, bringing, it seemed, half the desert with it, and, having torn down the tents of the nomads and uprooted the palms in the wadis, it flung itself, shrieking, against the mountains. The heavily barred shutters on the outer side of the house creaked and shivered under the strain. The sand silted under them and soon every room was covered with fine red dust. Our faces were also red, and everything we ate tasted of the desert. Our nostrils were choked with sand and our eyes inflamed.

That night no miners ventured across the waste space, littered with tins and other refuse, for it had become a battle-field in which everything that ought to have been on the ground was whirled as a weapon into the air. The inn was deserted and, when the heavy doors were shut, the yard, surrounded by high-walled buildings, became a vacuum in the middle of the storm. Sand had drifted over the inner porches and been swept into irregular waves between them, but, within the sheltered square, the air was comparatively still.

Long before it should have been dark I went to bed, because there was nothing else to do, but I could not sleep. The shutter within reach of my hand groaned like a victim of the Inquisition, and my pillow was covered with grit. After I had rolled about the plank bed till I knew every lump and crevice, and risen several times to pick up my blankets or push the mattress into place, I must have dozed, for, when I next became conscious, there was less noise. Under the door leading into the yard I perceived a faint gleam. There should have been a moon, and I wondered if the sky were clearing. While I sat up stiffly and began to remove vagrant straws from my person, I heard an unfamiliar sound. It did not belong to the storm and I could not tell from where it came. A long, shivering slither sounded on the roof or in the wall, but it might have been an echo carried by the wind. It was then I remembered the ghost, and I was out of bed

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in a second. Without any idea of what I meant to do, I scuttled, bare-footed, across the room and tore down the bar which fastened the door. It swung open with no more noise than a dozen other wooden structures were making, and before I had time to think, I found myself in the porch. It was dark under the sagging roof, and the posts stood out as thicker sections of blackness, but the yard was misted with faint light. I could not see anything above the walls, for starlight and storm had fused in a strangely luminous haze. There was still a subdued cacophony of sound made by the wind, and my heart was beating so loud that I could not have heard steps, but I certainly imagined them. And I saw a figure definitely shaped upon the comparative clearness of the yard.

There could be no mistaking the unusual lines. It was a man in dark, tight-fitting clothes with a crazy hat upon his head and the hat did not move, although it was tilted sideways over a kerchief folded round the head like a turban. At that minute, I was far too terrified even to retreat. My throat ached with the scream to which I could not give voice. My knees shook, and my spine dissolved into drops of jelly. Very cold they were. I could feel them sliding about. Soon I would have no bones left. Then I would collapse, but momentarily I could not even do that. I was forced to stand immobile, but sentient in every protesting nerve, while the figure approached. Sure-footed it stepped on to the porch and then I was certain I heard the slither of a rope sole. My mouth opened. I gathered all my force to make some sort of sound. For the figure turned towards me and I thought that on such a night even a ghost might well make a mistake with regard to rooms. A squeak of which any mouse would have been ashamed came from my lips, and then the figure disappeared. Hat and all it went through what I supposed to be a solid door.

This was too much for me. I crumpled on to my knees and in this ignominious fashion crept back into my room. The bed which hitherto had seemed so undesirable now became the only possible refuge. Into it I tumbled and with both blankets over my head and, I suspect, my fingers pushed into my ears, I prepared to lie stiff and shivering for the rest of the night. I counted the hours—six, at least—before dawn. And then, all at once, it was light, and a number of unexpected noises came from the porch and the adjoining rooms.

Indignant because I had been so frightened, and still more indignant at having slept after so fearful an experience, I shook the sand out of my dressing-gown and shuffled through more sand towards the door. The wind had dropped, but there was still a great deal of noise. As I prepared to shout for water, I saw the *patronne* hurrying along the porch. She took no notice of me, and I was surprised to see her push past a group of Arabs and go straight into Jonson's room.

Faces, bleached by fear under their coating of dust, turned towards me, and I asked what was the matter.

A boy whom I had hitherto only seen cleaning lamps answered that the Northern foreigner was dead.

Unbelieving, and angrier than ever, because I did not want my ghost to turn into a murderer, I stalked to the Swede's door, pushed it wide open and saw Madame Courbet leaning over the bed. In it Jonson lay with one arm flung out and his knees drawn up. He looked abandoned and comfortable. The position could not have been more natural, but in the middle of his back stood out, abrupt and altogether unreasonable, the handle of a knife.

The *patronne* looked up, and her eyes met mine. They were shrewd, guarded, and I thought decidedly puzzled. But my bewilderment was greater than hers. "The ghost," I said, "I saw it in the big hat and the handkerchief, just

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as you described. The door must have been barred, but it came straight through."

Imagining that I had been exceedingly helpful, I stood still and stared at the body of Jonson. It looked content and I was surprised, because I thought it would have annoyed the Swede very much to be killed by such an illogical adversary.

"Do not stand planted there," said the *patronne* sharply, and then: "What is this about the door?" and she sailed towards it, magnificent, full-breasted, with shining, waved hair and at least thirty buttons, all correctly fastened, bobbing up and down the front of her dress. I followed.

The staple which held the primitive wooden bolt had been torn right out of the wall. It hung crooked at the end of the bar, and slid off on to the floor when Madame Courbet touched it. "Your ghost," she said with scorn, "had evidently prepared the terrain beforehand!"

Blankly, I stared at the evidence of premeditated murder, and all I found to say was: "The big hat must have been so inconvenient."

"A pretty disguise!" exclaimed Madame Courbet. "If anyone saw him they would do just exactly as you did! He had nothing to fear. *Mon Dieu*, to think that he could commit murder like that at his ease! And in my own house—under my own eyes——"

At that moment the elderly Arab who acted as the French-woman's steward and shadow, and who probably knew more about corpses than anybody else present, announced from beside the bed that the Frangi was not dead.

Nobody had realized that he was in the room, so the *patronne's* surprise was excusable, but she showed signs of other emotions as well. I thought I recognized a certain embarrassment in her instructions, but she sent men running with orders to fetch one of the miners who knew something

of doctoring and to me she said with a force that drove me headlong towards my room: "That automobile of yours, if it works at all, take it and fetch a doctor." From the porch I heard the last sentence: "I have sent a man of the country on a horse, but you will go faster."

Of that I also was convinced. I would go as fast as possible, and I would not return. Hurrying into my clothes and collecting only the most essential of my few possessions, I called continuously for my driver, and eventually he came, looking frightened. "How much of your engine is left?" I asked with bitterness.

"*Qalil*," he said. "A little."

"Well, that little has got to work. Come with me."

Through the long *salle* we went, and I remembered to pick up some stale bread lying on a table, for we should get no breakfast. Then I thought of the bill and ran back to pay it, but the Frenchwoman would take no money. She fairly pushed me out of the yard, but, dropping things and picking them up, trying also to hold the enormous and slippery sausage the *patronne* pressed upon me, I asked: "Will he live?"

"It is possible. He is so strong."

"He'll have to get away from here. He's committed the one crime no Arab will forgive," I said, looking wildly round for the driver.

"Down there! He has gone ahead!" exclaimed the Frenchwoman, and:

"I knew it would happen. He was mad to think he could get that girl," I announced simultaneously.

"Yes, yes. Go now!" retorted Madame Courbet in the voice one uses to a lunatic, and then I had to hurry after the driver, for I did not know what more damage he would do to the car.

It started without much difficulty, but it stopped as easily,

THE INEFFICIENT GHOST

and in the end I procured a lift on a military camion bound for the nearest post of the Legion. There, oddly enough, the local butcher had just been assassinated, nobody knew why, unless it was for the few francs he carried, and I remember the officer in charge was much perturbed because he could not offer me a proper meal. But he gave me figs, bread and coffee, and he sent the doctor, who could do nothing at all for the butcher, sprawled so uncomplainingly under the wall of the fort, post-haste back along the way by which I had come to see if he could foster the life that still lingered in Jonson.

“All the same,” he commented, when I had related the tale, “it is not like an Arab to use a knife, and one would not have credited him with the courage to play the part of a ghost. He would expect to be cursed for such irreverence. These people are terrified of anything to do with a spectre. Are you sure, Madame, that the story is as you say?” I said I was quite sure, and later, when I heard that Jonson had recovered, I told the tale with satisfaction, for it seemed to me logical that a Caid of the Atlas should object to an infidel—and a miner who had the reputation of a bad character, as well—paying unwarranted attentions to any member of his family. That they were unwarranted I was sure. The girl of the boat would never stoop to look beyond the walls which she regarded, not even as a privilege, but as a right.

Then I received the shock of my life, for, in Tlemcen, where I spent some weeks working on a book and enjoying the company of Arab friends, I met the doctor who had forced Jonson back to life. He was a wise and cheerful man, with an incomparable knowledge of North Africa, where he had been born of French parents, and where he had worked for thirty years.

Under the shadow of a delicious blue tomb I paused to

ask how the Swede fared, and I remember the grey-haired man with his pleasantly shiny face and his neat moustache, replacing his hat and discouraging the attentions of a mongrel which liked the look of his yellow boots, while he replied: "*Tres bien, Madame, very well indeed, and now that he is married to a woman of the country——*" He got no further, for I seized his arm.

"What?" I gasped. "It isn't possible! He married her?"

"Yes, yes," returned the doctor, surprised. "There were difficulties, of course, but now they are married, and they have a café, with furnished rooms above it, at Oran. It is whispered that a great deal of business is arranged in those so innocent premises, but Jonson and his wife are a formidable pair. One would think twice before opposing such an alliance."

Unconsciously I had turned to walk beside the Frenchman. We descended the hill towards the town. Blind to the picturesque surroundings—for all I cared, the mosques with their fading ceramics, the tombs of saints and minor prophets, the trees with their burden of yellow flowers, might have been the slums of Marylebone or the last addition to ribbon development outside one of our octopus cities—I walked with head down, repeating: "I can't believe it. That girl!"

"*Mais, voyons,* Françoise Courbet was not exactly in her first youth."

"What are you talking about?" I asked, with a memory of sea-coloured eyes, and the instinctive movement of the hand in the thick woollen glove. How could she have reversed that gesture for the sake of a Jonson!

"Am I not telling you," said the doctor, with patient amiability, "that the big Swede married Françoise Courbet?"

Deprived of speech, I merely stared at him. "But why are you so surprised?" asked the Frenchman. "They were

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both in the same situation. There is no doubt the man made a good sum smuggling cocaine into the neighbouring *kasrs*, and when the woman found it out—for certain, mind you—the only thing to do was to marry her."

"Quite. Oh, quite!" I said, while my mind turned upside down. "I think if you don't object I will leave you here. By the way, was there not a Monsieur Courbet?"

"Evidently yes," replied the doctor. "Or, at least, one always imagined him to be the husband. He was very correct, and he had the good sense to die—of some quite ordinary disease—when his wife had had enough of him."

"Oh," I said, and walked straight into a field of bright blue flowers, without noticing the Frenchman's outstretched hand or the damage I was doing to an exceedingly decorative crop.

The doctor hesitated. Then he followed, and with tact extricated me from the field and the indignation of the peasants working in it.

So I told him the story of Jonson as I had supposed it to be, and he said, with a mixture of common sense and malice: "One sees that the English are romantic, but, Madame, I assure you, the Jonsons of this world are not. Surprise, interest at the sight of such eyes as you describe, yes, that is natural, but there is no reason to suppose the girl was ever anywhere near that particular *Kasr*. The Swede wanted the protection of your company when he handed over the packet of drugs, and no doubt before you came he had found it useful to pretend an interest in some lady who did not exist, in order to explain his visits to the mountains, his relationship, in fact, with the *Kasr*. But, without doubt, he had friends, for the trade is as old as the French occupation. If Jonson was possessing himself of too much of the business, some rival would decide to put a knife into his back, and it *was* into the back, you remember. An Arab of the hills

THESE ARE REAL PEOPLE

uses a rifle, and, when it is a matter of the family honour, he shoots his man face to face. All the same, there was some imagination in that affair of the ghost. I should say a Latin—but yes, undoubtedly the crime was of a Latin intelligence." The doctor spoke with pride. Then he looked at me, and his face softened into sympathetic amusement. "Come, Madame, you must drink a little glass with me—to the absence of romance, or, if you prefer it, to the business instincts of the new couple."

That was the last I heard of the Swede and the woman who reminded me of a sailing ship.

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